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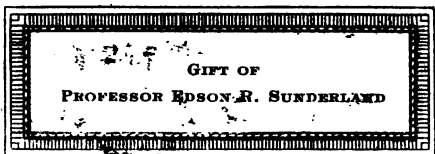
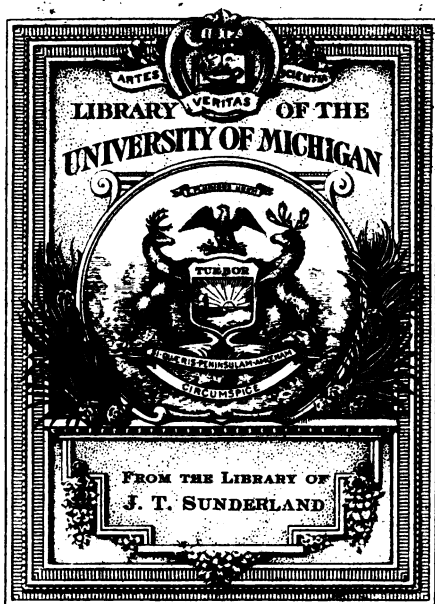
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THE STORY  
OF  
PROTESTANT DISSENT  
AND  
ENGLISH UNITARIANISM

BY  
WALTER LLOYD  
*(Minister of Barton Street Chapel, Gloucester)*

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## TO THE READER.

THE following story makes no claim to completeness, but is only an outline of a history which covers a long period though not a very wide area. In order to keep it within reasonable limits I have had to omit very many additional and interesting details which would have more fully illustrated some of the features of the Old Dissent; but I have everywhere striven to be accurate and to express no opinion for which I have not good warrant. That I have never inadvertently made a slip is more than I can expect.

I take this opportunity of gratefully acknowledging the valuable assistance I have received from the Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., principally in the shape of criticisms he made on my first sketch of the subject, in addition to which he has been good enough to supply me from time to time with hints and references which have considerably lightened the labour of research ; but I am alone responsible for the facts related and the opinions expressed in the following pages.

I have also to express my gratitude to a few friends who have generously subscribed towards the cost of the production of this book, thus manifesting in a practical manner their lively interest in the history of Unitarian Christianity ; and in doing this they have not only relieved me of financial anxiety but have enabled the publisher to offer the book at a lower price than would otherwise have been prudent.

WALTER LLOYD.

Gloucester, 1st October, 1899.





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## I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

**I**T appears to be necessary from time to time for those who are members of any ecclesiastical or religious society, to recall the story of the origin and progress of that society which otherwise tends to become obscured by traditions more or less mythical and erroneous, and there is often no better method of reviving an interest in the principles and objects of that society than by considering them from an historical point of view. This is no doubt the explanation of the innumerable histories of the various churches and denominations which are continually being issued from the press. Erroneous views of church history may be due to different causes; they may spring from a prejudice in favour of particular opinions or practices for which an historical sanction is sought, or from the reverse; they may spring from the fact that the members of a society have lost sight of the principles which originally brought its founders together; or they may spring from the incoming of new ideas, not con-

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sistent with the original aims of the society, and history may be distorted in order to find a justification for them.

That something of the kind should be the case with those religious societies which are generally known as Unitarian churches is only in accordance with a common experience; and those who are affected by one or other of the kind of prejudices referred to above may easily be led to take a distorted view of the history of the churches and institutions in which they are interested. That among Dissenters there are some who hold very erroneous views of the origin and aims of our churches and societies can scarcely be questioned, and my first object in the following sketch is to correct some historical misrepresentations which have been endorsed by the highest authority, and I only venture to question such authority in the interests of historical accuracy. But such misrepresentations as I have in mind are sometimes used to lessen the influence and depreciate the value of the work of Unitarian churches and associations by representing the members of them in such a way as to make them appear to contrast unfavourably with those whom it is the custom to call our Presbyterian or Protestant Dissenting forefathers.

Unusual importance has recently been given to opinions derogatory to Unitarian Christianity by the approval Dr. Martineau has publicly given to an unreasonable attack upon Unitarians and by his

endorsement of an altogether erroneous 'interpretation of our ecclesiastical history.'<sup>1</sup>

This is all the more remarkable for in the same publication Dr. Martineau gives expression to opinions which are entirely in accord with those of Unitarians. 'It is a humiliating certainty,' he says, 'that the progressive corruption of Christianity has been concurrent with the growth of its dogmatic theology, so that the leaves which were for "the healing of the nations" have fallen and perished as the dismal season of theological evolution advanced.' Dr. Martineau further refers to the 'host of traditional fancies, kosmical or mythologic, which can satisfy no mind and save no soul,' and adds, 'Nothing is less like the religion of Christ in human life than the story of church history.'

Yet those Christians who share Dr. Martineau's views of church history and who have withdrawn from the orthodox church because of its 'progressive corruption,' to whom its 'dogmatic theology' is repugnant, and who reject its 'kosmical and mythologic fancies,' are the very Christians whom all other Christians agree to call Unitarians.

In order to try to set this branch of ecclesiastical history in its true light and correct some false impressions which are current, I have ventured on a recapitulation of some of the landmarks in the history of the Unitarian churches, and have at-

<sup>1</sup> See extracts from letters by Dr. Martineau in preface to *Two Opposing Tendencies*.

tempted to link them together in a continuous story in their chronological sequence. I have for this purpose confined myself closely to the line upon which the early Unitarian congregations came into existence, and have intentionally refrained from excursions into a wider field; I have, therefore, limited myself to a sketch of the development of Protestant Dissent in its relation to English Unitarianism. That this history is almost forgotten, except by a few, has been demonstrated in some recent discussions, and the obvious bearing of it appears to have been lost sight of during recent years even by many well-informed Unitarians. The study of the history has cleared up some misconceptions which I had hitherto accepted upon the authority of distinguished writers, who, I am now led to conclude, were better philosophers and divines than historians.

One instance of such a misapprehension of our history as I have referred to is that which associates English Unitarianism almost exclusively with Presbyterianism, and claims for it, or at least for its congregational life, a purely denominational origin. It is assumed by some, as will appear in the course of these pages, that only Presbyterian congregations became Unitarian and sometimes even that all the old Presbyterian congregations exhibited a peculiar capacity for a progressive theology; and this, it is frequently asserted, was in consequence of the exceptionally liberal spirit which animated the



Presbyterians ; this theory being carried still further back, has led to the impression that Presbyterians alone were 'non-subscribers' and that they alone had so distinguishing a love of religious liberty as to omit from the trust deeds of their meeting-houses all reference to doctrines.

An instance of a different kind of misunderstanding is found in the fact that in the first half of the present century an attack was made upon Unitarians by the Evangelical Congregationalists on the ground that having so far departed from the theological opinions held by the founders or the first users of the meeting-houses they ought not to be allowed to retain possession of them. As there appeared to be an intention of a general assault, by the institution of suits for the removal of Unitarian trustees and the expulsion of Unitarian congregations from the old chapels, the Unitarians promoted the Dissenters' Chapels Bill which was passed by both Houses of Parliament in 1844, which protected them from the kind of interference which was meditated. Though the passing of this bill put an end to litigation it did not expel the spirit which had threatened it, and it found expression in the assertion that the Unitarians 'grabbed' the old chapels and then succeeded in getting an Act of Parliament passed to confirm them in the possession of their 'plunder.' I know that this view is held by some Congregationalists even at the present time. This way of putting it assumes that Unitarians were persons outside the congrega-

tions, who by some means between 1770 and 1820 obtained possession of the old chapels and forced the orthodox remnant to withdraw. This is quite contrary to the fact. The congregations which began as Calvinists and a hundred years later were Unitarian were the same congregations, the continuity was unbroken; Unitarianism came from within and not from without as will be seen in the course of the following pages.

It is the wide-spread prevalence of these erroneous views and the influence of certain inferences based upon them which has led me to attempt to correct them in my earlier pages; while in my later pages I have aimed at showing the real springs of English Unitarianism and at clearing it from the charge of sectarianism which is so frequently and unreasonably made against it. At the same time I call attention to the essentially religious character of Unitarian Christianity and prove it to be both theologically and intellectually free; characteristics which are sometimes denied it, not only by members of other denominations, but even by some, who, while they admit that they are not Trinitarian, prefer to be called by any name rather than Unitarian.

There is nothing more unmeaning, and yet, as commonly intended, more offensive, than the charge of sectarianism, when the word is used, as it generally is, in an invidious sense. In ordinary use a sect is nothing worse than a party or school or denomination, it signifies a group of persons who

hold certain opinions which distinguish them from other groups. Attachment to one's own party and opinions is not only pardonable but praiseworthy, it only becomes blameable when it leads to an unfair depreciation of other denominations and an offensive obtruding of the opinions of our own.

It is not sectarianism to hold one's own opinions or convictions firmly and to use every just means to commend them to others ; and in a general way this is regarded not only as proper, but as an imperative duty. Anglicans and Evangelicals, Methodists and Baptists, all use every endeavour to spread their particular tenets, and are never blamed for doing so ; it is only Unitarians, when they pursue the same course, who are condemned as sectarian. I have no doubt this is sometimes done from interested motives by persons who fear the spread of Unitarianism, and use this means of prejudicing others against it, as well of intimidating sensitive Unitarians themselves, and they are sometimes successful in their object. It is a curious illustration of this practice that when ministers, who are reputed orthodox, publish opinions which are indistinguishable from those long taught by Unitarians, they are praised for their liberality ; but when Unitarians defend the very same opinions, they are denounced as sectarian and dogmatical. In this way Unitarians are not only robbed of the credit which is their due, but also of the support to which they are entitled. At the risk of being called sectarian, I venture to

suggest to Unitarians that they should keep to the old way, and I shall rejoice if the story I have to tell stimulates fresh interest in the Unitarian cause, and if the examples afforded by the fathers of Unitarian Christianity tend to revive the more energetic methods they adopted with so much success. It can scarcely be questioned that the success of a cause is in proportion to the earnestness and boldness of those engaged in it, while a timid policy ensures certain failure.

It is frequently said, though I do not think by many people, that the time is gone by for controversy, or the energetic propagation of Unitarian Christianity. It is alleged that liberal views of religion are now becoming so general that the necessity for the peculiar work of Unitarian churches, which was called for a hundred years ago, no longer exists; that right and reasonable views of Christianity will before long so generally prevail that there will be no need for Unitarians to worship apart. In the first place, it is necessary to observe that that time is not yet come, and that those Christians who cannot worship in Trinitarian churches owing to the doctrines which are taught or the practices observed, will and must desire to have the opportunity to worship in a way harmonizing with their convictions.

And, further, it is necessary to remind ourselves that few people will give up error if they never have opportunities of becoming acquainted with truth,

and it is much more likely that Catholicism or Evangelicalism will revive and spread than that liberal Christianity will prevail without persistent effort on the part of those who hold liberal views to make them prevail. Both prejudice and interest tend to arrest progress, and it is only by constant struggle that the conservative tendencies of human nature are overcome. It may not unreasonably be held, as it is by some philosophical writers, that retrogression is a more natural process than progression, and it is only by resistance to this tendency that any advance is made. If they are regarded as equally natural, as perhaps they ought to be, it cannot be denied that regress is easier than progress, and therefore more likely to occur. When, therefore, we are advised to abstain from aggressive methods, on whatever grounds, we should receive such advice, if not with suspicion, at least with caution, and be on our guard lest, under the influence of what may appear to be commendable motives, Unitarians are induced, as a denomination, to take a course which may be suicidal.

In the spirit to which I have alluded, Unitarians are often bidden to cease to be controversial, but those who urge this are either persons who hold opinions which they do not wish to see controverted, or those who seem to think a state of indecision preferable to one of decided conviction; or perhaps in some cases they may be those who, having themselves found an intellectual equilibrium, think it

unadvisable to disturb other people. But it is impossible to live without controversy, or to use a word which means the same thing, but which has not fallen into so much disfavour, without discussion. Bagehot has described our present political method as government by discussion; and discussion, or controversy, is recognised as praiseworthy so long as it is between Catholics and Protestants, or Evangelicals and Anglicans; but it is certainly as important and no less commendable that there should be discussion between Unitarians and Trinitarians, for by no other means can the truth upon the subjects which divide them be arrived at. Silence will achieve nothing, and is more often the sign of indifference than impartiality.<sup>1</sup> It is only necessary that the discussion of religious topics should be carried on in a spirit of candour, charity, and courtesy, and that we should be animated by a love of truth and not a mere desire for victory.

As the minister of an old Protestant Dissenting congregation in the city which may claim to be the birthplace of English Unitarianism, I have been led to take a warm interest in the subject of the following pages, and this I hope may be accepted as an excuse for my undertaking a task for which others are no doubt better qualified. This sketch at least may help to preserve the outlines of our history, and

<sup>1</sup> 'Where there is much desire to learn, there, of necessity, will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.' Milton, *Areopagitica*.

serve in some measure as a guide to those who should wish to study the subject more fully for themselves.

In some respects I believe this story differs from most accounts of Unitarianism that have been written. There are standard histories of the progress of Unitarian opinions, and standard biographies of Unitarians; what I have attempted is a connected sketch of the rise of Dissenting Unitarian congregations and of the causes which led to their formation. These congregations did not have an independent origin like those of the Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists; the first Unitarian congregations, with one exception, that of Essex Street Chapel, were Protestant Dissenting congregations which only became differentiated from others by the fact of their coming to hold Unitarian opinions and adopting a Unitarian form of worship.

While my aim is thus to present what I believe to be a correct view of the historical relation of English Unitarianism to Protestant Dissent, it is also something more. I desire to remind the Unitarians of to-day of the greatness of their inheritance, and of the depth and breadth of the principles of Unitarian Christianity. The first is sometimes forgotten, and the second insufficiently appreciated.

## II.

### THE PRESBYTERIANS.

**B**ROADLY speaking, there are four stages in the history of Dissent along the line upon which the first Unitarian congregations are said to have arisen, though these may be again sub-divided. These stages are Presbyterianism, Baxterianism, Nonconformity, and Protestant Dissent. This statement would be correct if some important factors were not omitted. It has become customary to speak of these successive stages as if they whom they represent, especially the ministers, were all of one class, who are sometimes described as English Presbyterian non-subscribers—who put religion before doctrine, who rejected all creeds and professions of faith, who thoroughly understood the principles of religious liberty, who, when toleration was granted, founded their meeting-houses with 'open trusts' with a wise provision for the religious liberty of their successors; they apparently had no ancestors and have left no descendants; the Unitarians are in possession of their property, but are



unfaithful to the principles of religious freedom which animated the founders of the old chapels. But this short and easy way of writing history will not do. Presbyterianism was only one of the parents of Protestant Dissent, and Unitarianism is a child of the latter and not of Presbyterianism.<sup>1</sup>

We are, however, frequently told that 'English' Presbyterianism has nothing to do with the Presbyterianism of the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly, that by it is only meant the nominal Presbyterianism which dates from 1689, the period of toleration. But the Rev. J. H. Thom, in a note to a letter written by the Rev. John James Tayler in 1863, describes 'the organization with which we are traditionally connected' as 'The English Presbyterian non-subscribing congregations dating from the ejection of the two thousand on S. Bartholomew's Day, 1662.'<sup>2</sup> Dr. Martineau, in his Address on Church Organization delivered at the Leeds Conference in 1888, goes still further; after referring to some existing associations, such as the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire and the West of England Association of Presbyterian Divines, goes on to say, 'These fraternities are but

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, by Protestant Dissenters is meant the three denominations, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist, with which alone the Unitarian congregations have any connection. The Methodists and the Presbyterian Church of England are of later origin, and do not recognise the Protestant Dissenting principle of congregational liberty.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Tayler, *Letters*, Vol. II., p. 233.

crippled survivals of bodies that *once actually did all the things* which I have mentioned. In the time of the Commonwealth, as still existing records show, they were Presbyteries, etc.<sup>1</sup>

This connection with Presbyterianism being asserted, it appears to me to be necessary to make it my starting point. Dr. Martineau and Mr. Thom are so far right in asserting the continuity of Presbyterianism, and in admitting, if we are to recognise a Presbyterian origin at all, that we cannot draw the line at the year 1689. Dominant Presbyterianism can scarcely be called a form of dissent; it was, or aspired to be, the National Church of the three kingdoms. The chapels do not take their rise from that period, but some ministers of the time of the Commonwealth, and even of the Long Parliament, lived to gather congregations of their own after 1662 and some even lived to build chapels after 1689. No clear line of demarcation can be drawn between the Presbyterians of 1646 and the 'English' Presbyterians of the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore necessary to begin with a brief notice of Presbyterianism and to see what it was like and how far it can be credited with liberal principles. English Presbyterianism, if not born, was nursed and weaned in the reign of Queen Elizabeth; it was brought to England by exiles

<sup>1</sup> Leeds Address, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Neal very correctly calls the Parliamentary Presbyterians 'English Presbyterians' to distinguish them from the Scots.

who had been impressed by what they had seen or heard of Geneva under Calvin's control.

'During the time of their exile the authority of the constitution which Calvin had devised and, after many struggles, established, was unbroken, unshaken, almost unassailed; and those who visited Geneva saw a very remarkable and suggestive state of affairs. They saw, dominant over a whole community, a system of doctrine and discipline which was complete, coherent, and comprehensive; which ruled men, women, and children, and took heed alike of private and public life; which committed to an Ecclesiastical Court or Consistory "the care of all men's manners, power of determining all kind of ecclesiastical causes, and authority to convent, to control, to punish, as far as with excommunication, whomsoever they should think worthy, none, either small or great, excepted;" which could bring the full weight of the most awful sanction to bear alike on the least divergence in doctrine, the least point of ritual, the least disobedience in private life or in personal attire.'<sup>1</sup>

Such was the model which the English Presbyterians wished to see followed in their own land.— 'That we may altogether teach and practise that true knowledge of God's Word which we have

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on 'The Puritan Position' in the recently published *Introduction to the Fifth Book of Hooker's Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, by Dr. Francis Paget, Dean of Christ Church.

learned in this our banishment, and by God's merciful providence seen in the best reformed Churches.' The Presbyterians did not aim at religious liberty or toleration, but simply at ascendancy ; to displace the Episcopalian system and substitute for it one much more stern and rigid and intolerant. Of Thomas Cartwright, the leader of the Presbyterian party, Green says :—'No leader of a religious party ever deserved less of after sympathy than Cartwright. He was unquestionably learned and devout, but his bigotry was that of a mediæval inquisitor.'<sup>1</sup> Presbyterian discipline was no better than Popish tyranny under a new form. There was little to choose between the Episcopalians and Presbyterians —'Each party agreed too well in asserting the necessity of uniformity in public worship, and of using the sword of the magistrate for the support and defence of their principles, of which they both made an ill use, whenever they could grasp the power into their hands.'<sup>2</sup>

It is not necessary to trace the fortunes of Presbyterianism under Elizabeth and James I. ; it will be sufficient for our purpose to see what it was like when it was relatively dominant during the Long Parliament. This Parliament, which began in 1640, was not at first Presbyterian, and the extent of

<sup>1</sup> *Short History of the English People*, p. 468. The first Presbyterian in England was formed secretly at Wandsworth, in the year 1572.—See Paget, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Neal, Vol. I., p. 92.

Presbyterian influence in it is a matter of question. Clarendon says that the majority of the members, when it assembled, were in favour of Episcopal government, and did not desire any considerable alteration in Church or State. Other historians assert that from the beginning the party in favour of Presbyterian government was very strong in the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> Both are extreme views and neither wholly right, but one thing is certain, that as time went on the Episcopalians in the House declined in numbers and the Presbyterian influence increased.

There was originally no design on the part of the Parliament to overturn the existing ecclesiastical order. At first it only desired to purify the Church by the removal of 'scandalous' ministers; it then proposed to curtail the authority of the bishops by removing them from the House of Lords and reducing their power; it was hurried on by extreme men to call for the abolition of the Episcopacy. The Independents, or Separatists, who had no more love for Presbyterianism than they had for Prelacy, acted for the time with the Presbyterians, and joined in the 'root and branch' policy for the extirpation of Prelacy; but though all the sects were agreed in desiring the abolition of the Prelatical Church, there was no agreement as to what should be set up in its place.

The Royalist members withdrew from the Parlia-

<sup>1</sup> Stoughton, *Ecclesiastical Hist.*, Vol. I., p. 59.

ment, and, after the outbreak of the Civil War and the disasters which at first befell the Parliamentary army, the opponents of the Church had it all their own way. Prelacy was doomed, but it was the bargain with the Scots which determined the next step. Commissioners were despatched to Scotland to seek the assistance of the Scottish troops, and they not only asked for aid to carry on the war with the King, but also for the addition of some Scottish divines to the Westminster Assembly. Terms of union were debated; the English Commissioners were in favour of a civil league, but the Scots insisted upon a religious covenant. The former, says Dr. Stoughton, wished only for a bond between the nations to maintain the interests of civil liberty, the latter desired a confederation for the maintenance of the Protestant interest against Papal and Prelatical superstitions. Sir Harry Vane and Philip Nye, who were two of the English Commissioners, belonged to the party which advocated religious toleration, which was opposed to Presbyterian uniformity, and wished to keep an open door for Congregational liberty. In spite of their objections, the English Commissioners were reluctantly compelled to agree to the covenant, which was in no degree lessened in force by the addition of the league, and by it they were pledged to establish uniformity of religion in the three kingdoms, and the uniformity was to be after the Presbyterian pattern; but Presbyterianism was an exotic, and never took root on English soil.

The first step the Parliament took in the matter of religion was to determine upon a reformation of the clergy, and a committee was appointed to hear petitions and complaints against them. That the Puritans should cheerfully respond to the invitation thus given was only natural, and immediately petitions came in from all quarters, charging the clergy with insufficiency, false doctrines, illegal innovations, or scandal. Large numbers were removed from their appointments, and others, more to the liking of the Parliament, put in their places. These latter, says Calamy, were not non-conformists, but nearly all conformable ministers, the laws and the bishops having cast out the non-conformists long before;<sup>1</sup> that is to say, those whom we may call the Puritan clergy were all Episcopalians.<sup>2</sup> Even those who subsequently made up the bulk of the Westminster Assembly were almost all such as till then had conformed 'and took things to be lawful in case of necessity, but desired to have the necessity removed.' The Parliament having thus begun with proposals for the reform of the Episcopal Church, it was not long before it decided on its overthrow, and by 1643 it was prepared to agree with the Scots in their desire for the extirpation not only of Popery, but of Prelacy as well. English opinion was divided over the word Prelacy. Some did not object to Episcopacy altogether, but only to the 'English

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Baxter was one of them.

Diocesan Frame'; but in the end the covenant was taken by the Assembly and the Parliament and ordered to be taken by the nation.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines met in 1643. This Assembly was appointed by Parliament as an Ecclesiastical Court, not to make laws and canons, but to draw up a scheme for the settlement of religion for the consideration of the Parliament. The Assembly was not invested with authority, and could take no initiative; it was of the nature of an Advisory Committee.<sup>1</sup>

In this Assembly the divines in favour of Presbyterianism were in a majority; the Royalist Episcopal clergy who were invited did not attend, or soon withdrew; a number of the Lords and Commons were present to see that the ministers did not go beyond their commission.<sup>2</sup>

A few Independents were joined with them so that all parties might be represented. 'Five of these latter were called the "dissenting brethren";' they agreed with the rest until they had drawn up

<sup>1</sup> Though the Assembly was called the Assembly of Divines, it included laymen. 'There must be some laymen in the Synod to overlook the clergy, lest they spoil the civil work. Just as a woman puts a cat into the milk-house to kill a mouse, she sends her maid to look after the cat lest the cat should eat up the cream.'—Selden, *Table Talk*, sec. cxxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> 'In the ordinance for the Assembly the Lords and Commons go under the name of learned, godly, and judicious divines; there is no difference put between them and the ministers in the context.'—Selden, *Ibid.*



the Confession of Faith and the larger and shorter Catechism, but they disagreed when it came to the question of government. Calamy says they delayed the settlement, and finally, their opposition receiving more and more support, prevented the Presbyterian scheme being carried into effect except in London and Lancashire. This is a very imperfect statement, for the Parliament agreed to the Presbyterian settlement, and the scheme was, at least partially, carried out in many places. The limitation to London and Lancashire only applies to the Provincial Assemblies. The scheme included the Parish Presbytery of pastors, elders, and deacons; the Classical Assembly, composed of delegates from the parishes, and the Provincial Assembly. To complete the Presbyterian government a General Assembly was necessary, but this was a point never attained in England.<sup>1</sup> The Presbytery was adopted in many parishes, classes were formed in some districts, and Provincial Assemblies in London and Lancashire. None of these arrangements were universal. In some places the scheme was opposed, and in others where it was adopted it was, after a time, abandoned.

The results of the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly are thus summarized:—‘Being called together to give advice concerning the settlement of doctrine, worship, and Church government, they after some time presented to Parliament a Confession of Faith, a larger and shorter Catechism,

<sup>1</sup> Stoughton, *Ecc. Hist.*, Vol. I., pp. 165-7.

a Directory for the Public Worship of God throughout the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and their humble Advice concerning Church Government. After the last had been presented the two Houses of Parliament agreed upon sundry ordinances, directions, and votes for the speedy establishment of the Presbyterian government.’<sup>1</sup>

Calamy gives a list of some of these ordinances, but there are two which demand special attention as illustrating the intolerance of the Presbyterian régime. The first is the Ordinance of Parliament, 23rd August, 1645, ‘For the more effectual putting in execution the Directory for Public Worship,’ etc. This ordinance made it penal, on the one hand, for any person or persons to use the Book of Common Prayer, or cause it to be used in any church, chapel, or public place of worship, or in any private place or family; and on the other hand, it was also made an offence on the part of any minister not to use the Directory, or to preach, write, or print, or cause to be written or printed, anything in the derogation or depraving of the said book.<sup>2</sup>

Calamy admits the intolerance displayed in this edict, and all he has to say in its defence is: ‘This ordinance is, I confess, an evidence of what is too plain to be denied, that all parties, when they have been uppermost, have been too apt to bear hard on those who have been under them.’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase is from the Act of Uniformity, 1 Elizabeth, c. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 186.

The other is the famous 'draconic' ordinance of 2nd May, 1648.<sup>1</sup> This was an ordinance of Parliament for the punishing of blasphemies and heresies. It was as sweeping as it was severe, and not only ordained that any person who persisted in the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity should suffer death, as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy, but made it equally a serious offence to deny the authenticity of any one book contained in the canon of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Under error, heresy, and schism the ordinance specifies Independency, Anabaptism, Antinomianism, Arminianism, Socinianism, Scepticism, and Erastianism. Against these they say 'the carrying of the work of uniformity shall be studied and endeavoured by us, before all the worldly interests.'<sup>3</sup>

This ordinance happily never received the force of law. The disgrace of originating it did not rest with the Assembly, but with the Presbyterian members of the House of Commons, 'under the sharp stimulus of hatred to the various sects.' 'This,' says Neal, 'is one of the most shocking laws I have met with in restraint of religious liberty, and shows

<sup>1</sup> For text of this ordinance see Wallace, Vol. III., p. 588.

<sup>2</sup> 'In the year 1648, an ordinance was passed in the Long Parliament, by which it was actually made an offence, punishable by death, to deny that which is manifestly only a matter of historical inquiry—the authenticity of any one of the books contained in the canon of Scripture. I question if a more singular enactment was ever passed.'—Mr. W. E. Gladstone, *Debates on Dissenters' Chapels Bill*, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> See note by Rutt, *Burton's Diary*, Vol. I., p. cxviii.

that the governing Presbyterians would have made a terrible use of their power had they been supported by the sword of the civil magistrate.'<sup>1</sup>

The influence of Cromwell and the Independents prevented this ordinance becoming law, but was not able to save Biddle and others from persecution. The same intolerant spirit animated the Presbyterians for several years, and manifested itself even under the Commonwealth. In 1654 the subject was again under discussion, when it was asked that the heresies against which a new Bill was directed should be enumerated, as it was evidently the wish of some to convert the ordinance of 1648 into an Act of Parliament. This was referred to a committee, but at the same time John Biddle, the author, and the printers of a *Twofold Catechism*, were ordered to appear before the House, which Biddle did on December 13th.<sup>2</sup>

On January 15th of the next year the committee recommended that a Bill be brought in for the punishing of the said John Biddle, and nothing less

<sup>1</sup> Neal, Vol. II., p. 282. He adds: 'The Presbyterians of the present age are not only thankful that the confusion of the times did not permit their predecessors to put this law in execution, but wish also that it could be blotted out of the records of time, as it is impossible to brand it with a censure equal to its demerits.' Recent Presbyterian historians are generally silent about English Presbyterianism.

<sup>2</sup> A full and interesting account of this incident, with an extract from the journals of the House, will be found in *Burton's Diary*, Vol. I., cxvii.

was expected than that he would receive sentence of capital punishment, but shortly after, Cromwell dissolving Parliament, Biddle was released. The case of Nayler, the Quaker, occupied Parliament for a considerable part of the session. Many members demanded that he should be put to death, but the majority consented to let him off with mutilation, flogging, and the pillory. These are some of the things which the Presbyterians *once actually did*, to use Dr. Martineau's phrase, in the time of the Commonwealth.

It is unnecessary to multiply instances of Presbyterian intolerance, but it is necessary to call it to mind when Unitarians are asked to trace their descent from these persons, for at least some of those who displayed this intolerance were afterwards associated with the leaders of Non-conformity, and even lived to be founders of chapels with 'open trusts'; and in order to understand and appreciate their later actions it is necessary to bear in mind their earlier ones. The love of liberty, with which they are credited by Dr. Martineau, was never in them.<sup>1</sup>

The honour of resisting Presbyterian tyranny belongs to the Independents, whose principles favoured general toleration. The Presbyterians

<sup>1</sup> Leeds Address, p. 22. 'The Presbyterian Hierarchy was as narrow as the prelatical, as it did not allow liberty of conscience, claiming a civil as well as ecclesiastical authority over men's persons and properties, it was equally, if not more insufferable.'—Neal, Vol. II., p. 163.

would have interfered with the civil rights of the people by calling upon the magistrates to enforce the authority of the Church. The Independents saw that the Presbyterian scheme would be fatal to the liberties of the nation, and in 1644 Philip Nye boldly opposed it in the Assembly. He asserted that the liberties for which the people fought would be imperilled if Presbyterianism were established.<sup>1</sup> Some trifling concessions were offered the Independents on condition that they did not set up separate congregations, but with this they were naturally dissatisfied. Presbyterianism gained a temporary victory, and was virtually established; but it was disestablished again by Cromwell, who, in 1653, proclaimed a general toleration.<sup>2</sup> Toleration was practically confined, as far as the exercise of the ministry was concerned, to Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents.<sup>3</sup> These could exercise the office in parish churches, if approved by Cromwell's Commissioners; there was no attempt at enforcing uniformity, no distinct articles of faith were pre-

<sup>1</sup> Stoughton, *Ecc. Hist.*, I., p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> 'The union and agreement of Presbyterian churches was broken up by an ordinance of Cromwell, even in those places where it had succeeded. Synods and assemblies, and all the peculiar characteristics of Presbyterian church government, ceased to exist long before the Restoration.'—Mr. Booth in the *Wolverhampton Case, Report*, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> That is, ministers of Episcopalian sympathies; and the occasional use of the Book of Common Prayer was not forbidden.

scribed, no subscription whatever was enforced.<sup>1</sup> The Presbyterians would have preferred the enforcement of subscription by the ministers to the doctrines of Presbyterianism. Toleration did not extend to Roman Catholics, infidels, or heretics, and though, as a matter of course, Episcopacy was barred, Episcopalians were not deprived of their civil rights. But within very wide limits it was an era of religious liberty. In 1660 the Presbyterians invited Charles II. to the throne, but it was in the belief that he would consent to the establishment of the Church upon Presbyterian lines, or at least of a Church in which the Presbyterians could find a place.<sup>2</sup> Liberty for Dissenters was as far from their thoughts as ever. Comprehension became their dream; and as the bishops could not be prevented from regaining their place and power, the Presbyterians and some Episcopalians proposed a modified Episcopacy and various reforms in the liturgy and ceremonies, either to be generally adopted or to be allowed to those who desired them. One thing to be borne in mind is that doctrine was not in question. The difference between the ministers and the bishops was not one of creed. Over and over again they declared that on these matters they were in full agreement, and nothing can be

<sup>1</sup> Stoughton, I., p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Presbyterians by their influence first divided and then dissipated the sectarian party, and so made way for his Majesty's return in peace.'—Corbet, *Interest of England*, etc., p. 46.

further from the truth than to say, as it has been said, that the Nonconformists left the Church, or were expelled from it, either for their attachment to religious liberty or on account of their dislike to creeds and doctrines. The bishops, in their first answer to the London ministers, said: 'We first observe that they take it for granted that there is a firm agreement between them and us on the doctrinal truths of the reformed religion, and in the substantial parts of Divine worship.'<sup>1</sup> The Act of Uniformity did not apply to heresy, but to schism, and it recognised no doctrinal difference between Conformist and Non-conformist. It was taken for granted that no objection was raised to the creeds or to the doctrinal articles of the Church. A fuller consideration of the Act and its consequences will come later. It is only referred to here to complete the sketch of the Presbyterians, and to show that in 1662 they had not changed in this particular. It was not until the effects of the Act of Uniformity came to be felt that the English Presbyterians began to have a little respect for the liberty of others. As long as they had the power they invariably showed themselves to be one of the most intolerant parties that ever aspired to rule in the Church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Documents, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> It is therefore impossible to see how the word Presbyterian, even with the epithet 'English' prefixed, can secure a 'Catholic Conception,' as Dr. Martineau affirmed in his address at Leeds (see p. 34).



### III.

#### RICHARD BAXTER.

**R**ICHARD BAXTER is so prominent a figure in the history of Nonconformity, he is so often appealed to, so often held up as an example, and he actually tried to construct a *via media* between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, that it is necessary to give him special attention and to try to ascertain what his position really was. Moreover, he is held up as a model of Catholicity whom we ought to imitate, and the Unitarians are condemned for having forsaken his ideal.

'Baxterian Catholicity' is Dr. Martineau's phrase, and it is desirable to clear away the misconception which such a phrase naturally creates. It is probable, but not certain, that Baxter was more tolerant than the Presbyterians in the Parliament, and that he strove for peace in the Church, but we shall find he never had any lofty idea of religious liberty, but was consistently opposed to it; that his toleration had well defined and somewhat narrow limits, and that his 'Catholicity' was, in the main, a spirit of

compromise, a spirit which directed his dealings with the Prelatical and Presbyterian parties.

To make a beginning, we may start with Baxter's sermon on the *True Catholic and the Catholic Church Defined* (1659).<sup>1</sup> This sermon will show us what was Baxter's idea of Catholicity at the time. It was tolerant for the age, but offers little to commend it to us who follow greater masters, for even the Evangelicals who refuse to have fellowship with Unitarians will find themselves justified by Baxter. The greater part of this sermon is taken up with arguments against the claim of the Papists to be the true Catholic Church. This does not concern us at present; we are more interested in his definition of the true Catholic and his attitude to liberal ideas. He says:—'And whereas it is a great question whether heretics are members of the Catholic Church. The answer is easy; contend not about a word. If by a heretic you mean a man that denieth or leaves out any essential part of Christianity, he is not a member of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

We have no difficulty in finding out who those heretics were who, in his opinion, left out or denied essentials of Christianity:—'All is blasphemy with some men, error at least, which they do not understand. Alas, we have real heresies enough among us—Arians, Socinians, Ranters, Quakers, Seekers, Libertines, Familists, and many others; let us reject those that are to be rejected, and spare not.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baxter's *Practical Works*, Vol. xvi.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. xvi., p. 287.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. xvi., p. 332.

After the battle of Naseby, we are told he went into the army, but there he got such intelligence as to the religious opinions of the forces as 'amazed him,' for 'Independency and Anabaptistry, Antinomianism and Arminianism, were equally distributed.'<sup>1</sup>

Later in life his toleration appeared to extend to the Independents, but this was practically the only difference between him and the Presbyterians, so far as toleration was concerned. In his sermon on Catholic unity, he says :—'I profess, sirs, I speak to you from sad experience. I have been troubled with Antinomians and Anabaptists, and other errors in well-meaning men as much as most, and many a day's work they have made me in writing and disputing against them. I thank God I have dealt with all these errors with so much success that I live in peace by them ; and I know not of an Anabaptist, or Socinian, or Arminian, or Quaker, or Separatist, or any such sect, in the town where I live, except half-a-dozen Papists that never heard me.'<sup>2</sup>

And yet Baxter is held up as a model of Catholicity, and we are asked to believe that he always put religion before doctrine. Doctrine was the life and soul of Baxter's religion ; he was really, in his way, a great theologian, and a still greater controversialist. No doubt he strove, and strove successfully, against evil living, but he strove none the less earnestly against every opinion which differed from his own. He is not to be blamed for

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 87.    <sup>2</sup> *Works*, xvi., p. 393.

this; it is perfectly natural to most men who find themselves, by reason of their abilities, in the position of leaders; the mistake is to disregard this characteristic of the great preacher, and to imagine that he was so much more liberal and 'Catholic' than he actually was.

In the year 1675 he published his *Catholic Theology*, but here again we see that the word Catholic is used by him in a very restricted sense, and we find confirmation of the view that his Catholicity was not Catholic in the sense in which we use the word. In this book on Catholic theology he merely undertook to prove that 'Besides things unrevealed and known to none, and ambiguous words, there is no considerable difference between the Arminians and the Calvinists, except some very tolerable difference in the point of perseverance.'<sup>1</sup> The probability is that he was less hostile to Arminianism than he had been some years before, and he was desirous of justifying himself in tolerating, if not accepting, opinions which he had formerly condemned; and he did so by the not unusual method of saying there is not so very great a difference after all. But Calvinism and Arminianism were the extreme points of doctrine he allowed; if Calvinism developed into Antinomianism, or Arminianism into Socinianism, they were outside the pale of his toleration. In 1672, when he was one of the preachers at the Merchants' Lecture at

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 417.

Pinner's Hall, 'the city was full of rumours that he was preaching up Arminianism.'<sup>1</sup> Calamy also states that amongst his posthumous publications was a treatise on universal redemption. The controversy between Calvinists and Arminians turns largely upon the extent of redemption, whether Christ died for the elect only or for all men. A discussion on the question having arisen between Dr. Kendall and Baxter, they once met at the lodgings of Archbishop Ussher and agreed to let him arbitrate between them. Ussher declared himself in favour of the doctrine of universal redemption, but persuaded them to discontinue the controversy.<sup>2</sup> On this point Baxter appears to have been eclectic, and tried to reconcile universal redemption with personal election.

But to return to toleration. In the year 1660 Baxter was brought to the point in the discussion on the King's proposed indulgence. After the main provisions of the Declaration had been debated, the Lord Chancellor proposed an addition to the Declaration in response to a petition for liberty which had been presented by the Independents and Anabaptists. He proposed 'That others also be permitted to meet for religious worship, so be it, that they do it not to the disturbance of the peace, and that no Justice of the Peace or officer disturb them.' This put Baxter and his Presbyterian friends in a difficulty, as they believed it was intended also to secure liberty to the

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 405.

Papists ; but they were afraid to speak openly against it, lest all the sects and parties should look upon them as the causers of their sufferings, and they should be represented as grossly partial in demanding liberty for themselves and refusing it to others. At last Baxter said 'That Dr. Gunning, a little before, speaking against sects, had named the Papists and Socinians ; that for their part they did not desire favour for themselves alone, and rigorous severity against none ; but as they humbly thanked His Majesty for his declared indulgence to themselves, so they distinguished the tolerable party from the intolerable ; for the former, they humbly craved just lenity and favour, but for the latter, such as the two sorts mentioned, for their parts, they could not make their toleration their request.'<sup>1</sup>

This was the extreme limit of Baxter's Catholicity ; as long as he was able he would not tolerate those who were not of his way of thinking. When unavoidable, and in order to secure toleration for his own party, he went a little further, though not without manifest reluctance ; but it is plain that toleration was distasteful to him. He loved uniformity as much as a Prelatist or a Presbyterian.

Doctrine, I have said, was the life and soul of Baxter's religion, and he would have been astonished at anyone attempting to separate them, for, after all, this is the heresy of Socinianism. *The Call to the Unconverted*, essentially a religious

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 150.

work, is doctrinal throughout. In it Baxter expounds the doctrine of the Trinity as an essential of Christianity, and explains almost with scholastic preciseness the peculiar offices of each of the Divine Persons. 'So that by this you see that there are three persons in the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—so each of these persons have their several works, which are eminently ascribed to them.' But the whole of this solemn appeal, which is said to have had such an immense success in converting sinners, is based upon the doctrines of original sin, endless punishment, and vicarious atonement. These doctrines were inseparable from Baxter's religion; they were fundamentals which only Socinians disputed.

Baxter was opposed to the true doctrine of liberty of opinion, and refused the right of the individual to differ from the Church. 'It is an uncatholic dividing principle to hold that where the churches agree upon a circumstance of worship as convenient, any particular persons shall walk singularly, refusing to consent to that agreement, unless it be against the Word of God.'<sup>1</sup>

Liberty of conscience, which we claim in these days, was a principle which Baxter hated; he tells us that during the short period he spent in the army his life was a daily contending against seducers. 'But their most frequent and vehement disputes were for liberty of conscience, as they called it; that

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, Vol. xvi., p. 360.

is, that the civil magistrates had nothing to do with religion, by constraint or restraint, but every man might not only hold and believe, but preach and do in matters of religion what he pleased.'<sup>1</sup>

The severity with which Baxter wrote against Sir Harry Vane the younger, the subject of Milton's admiration, can scarcely be exceeded; but Vane had excited Baxter's animosity, not only by his *Earnest Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, but because he also, like Milton, denounced the Presbyterian ministers for their intolerance.

The 'Baxterian Catholicity' praised by Dr. Martineau is evidently only a product of the imagination. It never had any objective existence; it meant no more than that those who were agreed upon certain fundamentals ought to sink minor differences and join together, not only for the conversion of sinners, but also to oppose all sects and heresies; and 'sects' meant all parties which refused to accept Baxter's scheme of Church government, and every theological opinion outside his own moderate Calvinism he regarded as heretical. Baxter was so far from having a truly Catholic spirit and tolerant regard for other people's opinions that Mr. Skeats, with some exaggeration perhaps, describes his controversial works as 'the most abusive even of that age,'<sup>2</sup> and calls him with perfect justice 'the disputatious but zealous Baxter.'<sup>3</sup>

I do not recall these characteristics of Baxter

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 89. <sup>2</sup> Skeats, p. 57. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



with any intention of depreciating the real excellence of the man, and, indeed, to be 'disputatious and zealous' for what he believed to be the truth, was itself praiseworthy; but a misplaced admiration of him only creates a false impression. He had real excellencies enough for which we may admire him, without crediting him with others which he had not. There are some things we may learn from Baxter, and to be zealous is one of them, but the Unitarians of to-day are infinitely more 'Catholic,' in a broad sense, than it ever entered the mind of the author of the *True Catholic* to be.

It may be said that after the Restoration and the ejection of the Non-conformists Baxter became more tolerant, and that it is the later Baxter and not the earlier whom we ought to take for our example; which is certainly true if we are to take him for an example at all. But the Baxter whose character I have attempted to sketch is the Baxter who influenced his time; the Baxter of Kidderminster, of the Commonwealth, of the Restoration, the author of the *Call to the Unconverted* and the *True Catholic*—Baxter defeated, persecuted, growing old, may have become more charitable, but that is not the Baxter who is the hero of Nonconformity.

It is not easy to make Baxter's ecclesiastical position clear, not because he did not make it clear himself, but because it has been so misunderstood and persistently misrepresented. He used the word Catholic in a special sense, and not as an equivalent

for universal toleration. A Catholic Church, in his opinion, would have been a Church, a National Church, that is, based upon what he believed to be a primitive model, which would not have allowed any great amount of variety, but to which he thought no one ought reasonably to object. His ideal, a very praiseworthy one, but impracticable, was not to include the sects, but to abolish them. He was always opposed to Independency which was Separatism or schism;<sup>1</sup> he did not accept Presbyterianism, but he preferred the word presbyter to priest, though the Presbyterians, when they could get nothing more to their liking, were inclined to accept Baxter's Episcopal scheme. We are misled by the frequency and assurance with which Baxter is called a Presbyterian; he was an Episcopalian, though he was opposed to the 'English Diocesan Frame.' He was so far a Churchman that he did not approve of lay interference in ecclesiastical affairs, and he held that ordination could only be conferred by bishops.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Grossart tells us that Baxter 'opposed the Solemn

<sup>1</sup> 'The persons known by the name of Nonconformists were not separatists.'—Corbet, *Interest of England*, etc., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> 'Richard Baxter distinguishes between "three sorts of sacraments" in the second sense of the name, in which it is taken to mean "any solemn investiture of a person by ministerial delivery, in a state of Church privilege or some special gospel-mercy," he grants "that there are five sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, Absolution, the Lord's Supper, and Ordination."'—The Rev. F. Paget, D.D., *on Sacraments, Lux Mundi*, 8th ed., p. 425.

League and Covenant none the less intrepidly that he had himself rashly signed it at Coventry, and thus incurred the dislike of his co-Presbyterians; he opposed the Engagement, and similarly offended the Independents; he opposed root and branch extirpation of Episcopacy, and thus exasperated the Scots.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Grossart ought to have seen that Baxter opposed the Solemn League and Covenant because he was *not* a Presbyterian; that he opposed the Engagement because he was *not* an Independent; and that he opposed the 'root and branch' policy because he *was* an Episcopalian.

Mr. Skeats says that Baxter protested in his latest works that the body to which he belonged was in favour of a National Church. 'He disavowed the term Presbyterian, and stated that most whom he knew did the same.'<sup>2</sup>

When the English Diocesan Frame was revived by the Act of Uniformity of 1662, Baxter refused to conform, but he was only a Non-conforming Churchman, or a Dissident Episcopalian.

It may be worth while to explain what Baxter really wanted and the motives which determined his preference of Synodical to Diocesan Episcopacy. Put into a sentence, it is that he wanted to lessen the authority of the bishop and increase that of the parish priest. His scheme differed in several important particulars from Presbyterianism, but it was

<sup>1</sup> Grossart, Article *Baxter*, Nat. Dic. Biog.

<sup>2</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 117.

just as despotic. He thought every parish priest or presbyter should have as much authority as the bishop, who would simply be the first among his equals, the president of the synod.<sup>1</sup> When Milton wrote 'New presbyter is but old priest writ large,' it was literal truth and not mere bitter sarcasm; and Baxter himself said: 'The word minister may well be used instead of priest and curates, though the word deacon, for necessary distinction, stand, yet we doubt not but priest, *as it is but the English of presbyter*, is lawful.'<sup>2</sup> And that the idea corresponded with the word is also admitted, for Baxter further said: 'It is the very nature and substance of the office of a presbyter to have the power of the keys for binding and loosing, retaining or remitting sin.'<sup>3</sup> His objection to the diocesan system was not in the least in the interests of liberty, but because it did not give sufficient authority to the parish minister. 'If all presentments and appeals be made to the *bishop* and his *consistory* alone, it will take from us the *parish discipline* which is granted us, and cast almost all discipline out of the Church.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Some of them (the Presbyterians) commend and I think most of them in England here allow in order to peace *Episcopum Praesidum non Principem*.'—Corbet, *Interest of England*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rejoinder of the Ministers, 1661.—*Documents*, p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> Petition of the Ministers, 1660.—*Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents*, p. 90. 'Baxter's friend, John Corbet, who aimed at a reconciliation between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, says "For the main principle of Presbyterianism is this—that every

And with still more detail he explains: 'The Prelacy which we disclaim is that of diocesans—*upon the claim of a superior order to a presbyter*—assuming the sole power of public admonition of particular offenders, enjoining penitence, excommunicating, and absolving (besides confirmation) over so many churches, as necessitated the corruption or extirpation of discipline, and the using of human officers (as chancellors, surrogates, officials, commissaries, archdeacons) while the undoubted officers of Christ (the pastors of the particular churches) were hindered from the exercise of their office.'<sup>1</sup>

They were willing, said Baxter, to submit to the primitive Episcopacy and a reformed liturgy, they only expressed their dislike of the Prelacy and present liturgy while unreformed.

With regard to subscription, he said: 'We humbly acquaint your Majesty that *we* do not dissent from the doctrine of the Church of England, expressed in the Articles and Homilies, but it is the controverted passages about *government, liturgy, and ceremonies*, and some by-passages and *phrases in the doctrinal part*, which are scrupled by those whose liberty is desired. Not that we are against subscrib-

minister is truly a Pastor, and that pastoral authority includes both teaching and ruling, for which cause the Presbyters may not yield up themselves as the Bishop's meer curats or subjects.'"—Corbet, *Interest of England*, pp. 69, 70.

<sup>1</sup> Petition of the Ministers, 1660, *Documents*, p. 84.

ing the proper rule of our religion, or any meet Confession of Faith. Nor do we scruple the Oath of Supremacy or Allegiance.'<sup>1</sup>

These extracts from Baxter's proposals are perhaps sufficient to indicate his ecclesiastical position. He was opposed to Papacy, but he did not favour liberty; he disowned the divine right of the bishops because he claimed the divine right of the presbyter; he claimed for the presbyters the right of absolving, excommunicating, and confirming; he would rule, and rule alone, in his parish; but he was willing to accept the form of synodical government with a fixed presidency or Episcopacy.

<sup>1</sup> Petition of the Ministers, *Documents*, p. 96.

#### IV.

#### THE EJECTED MINISTERS.

THE story of the ejected and silenced ministers has been told so many times, their martyrdom has been so often glorified, their heroism been made the subject of eloquent panegyric, that it is unnecessary to repeat the tale. Their reasons for leaving the Established Church appear to have been forgotten, and they are credited with motives which they did not entertain. It is also forgotten that the two thousand who were ejected 'were not all men of like piety or strictness in their morals.'<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes assumed that they were influenced by opposition to the doctrines of the Church, and by an enlightened desire for religious liberty. We have already seen from their great leader, Baxter, that this was not the case. Doctrine had nothing to do with their ejection, except, perhaps, where they thought the doctrine of the Prayer Book too lax. If there was any difference, so far as doctrine was concerned, the Conformists were more liberal

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Account of the Ministers, &c.*, Vol. II., p. 26.

than the Non-conformists. The Church of the Restoration was Arminian, while the Puritans were Calvinists. There is one curious and instructive instance in which the ministers objected to a particular doctrine, but only because it was too liberal; that was the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration and certain salvation consequent thereupon*. We may object to the doctrine, but for a very different reason to that set forth by the ministers. If they consented and assented to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, they said: 'It would be an approbation of the rubric at the end of the public office for baptism, where 'tis said, "It is certain, by God's Word, that children which are baptiz'd, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved."'

This rubric is sometimes objected to because it implies that there may be some doubt about the salvation of unbaptized infants; but these ministers objected to it for the opposite reason—they would not agree that any infants, baptized or unbaptized, would certainly be saved.<sup>1</sup> Calamy discusses this objection at length, and in defending it from the criticism of Hoadley, says: 'For my part, I'm not for positively damning, without good warrant, and least of all should I be for being severe towards infants; but yet, sending all infants undoubtedly to heaven that are baptized, is certainly too lax.'<sup>2</sup>

With the Restoration, the Prelatists regained

<sup>1</sup> *Rejoinder of the Ministers* (1661), *Documents*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 207.



the position of power in the Church and in Parliament; and the Presbyterians, who in 1646 were all for an unmitigated Presbyterian government, would have been glad to have received a moderate amount of recognition, and would willingly have remained in the Church if too rigid a uniformity had not been required. They did not ask for a general toleration, but they were willing to accept a Synodical Episcopacy, and they wished for liberty to substitute some other forms of worship for those contained in the Book of Common Prayer. They would perhaps have agreed to an Act of Uniformity which would have placed Baxter's Reformed Liturgy on a level with the Prayer Book, but would not have allowed any further liberty in the form of Church government or in doctrine. They pleaded also for a preaching and praying ministry; the Church prayers were too short and cold. 'A brief, transient touch and away is not enough to warm the heart aright; and cold prayers are like to have a cold return, and therefore, even for peace sake, let us pray more copiously and heartily than the Common Prayer Book will help us to do.'<sup>1</sup>

The chief compulsory ceremonies they objected to were the wearing of the surplice, the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, and kneeling at the Communion of the Lord's Supper. These ceremonies they looked upon as Papistical, especially kneeling at the Sacrament, as this was regarded as countenancing the doctrine of transubstantiation.

<sup>1</sup> Rejoinder of the Ministers (1661), *Documents*, p. 212.

One great obstacle to many of the ministers remaining in the Church was the requirement of their re-ordination; many of them would have agreed to everything else, but this would have been an admission that their ordination by 'mere presbyters' was no ordination at all, and that they had exercised the office without proper authority and therefore sinfully. 'Pray, sir,' said Ward, the Bishop of Exeter, to John Howe, 'what *hurt* is there in being re-ordained?' '*Hurt*, my lord,' replied Howe, 'it hurts my understanding; the thought is shocking; it is an absurdity, since nothing can have two beginnings. I am sure I am a minister of Christ, and am ready to debate the matter with your lordship, if your lordship pleases; but I cannot begin again, to be a minister.'

In all the requests and objections of the ministers we find no allusion to doctrinal freedom or religious liberty; they demanded full recognition and certain alterations, and that was all.

'At the Restoration,' says Green, 'religious liberty seemed again to have been lost. Only the Independents and a few despised sects, such as the Quakers, upheld the right of every man to worship God according to the bidding of his conscience. The bulk of the Puritan party, with the Presbyterians at its head, was at one with its opponents in desiring uniformity of worship, if not of belief, throughout the land; and had the two great parties in the Church held together, their weight would have been

almost irresistible.<sup>1</sup> The Act of Uniformity saved the cause of religious liberty by preventing this undesirable coalition. The prospects were much the same as in 1646, when the two Houses of Parliament laid their terms of peace before the King. Among other things they then asked for the abolition of Episcopacy, and the establishment of the Presbyterian Church. They said nothing about toleration or liberty. The terms were refused by Charles. 'What will become of us,' asked a Presbyterian, 'now that the King has rejected our proposals?' 'What would have become of us,' retorted an Independent, 'had he accepted them?'<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the Episcopalians would not make the concessions asked for, except in one or two trifles, and an absolute uniformity was decreed by the Act of 1662. This Act took no cognizance of doctrine, because it was admitted that doctrine was not in question. It was an Act for the Uniformity of Public Prayers and Administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies, and for establishing the form of making, ordaining, and consecrating Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the Church of England.

It does not follow that if this particular Act had not been passed that any greater amount of liberty would have been allowed. Baxter and the Presbyterians were quite as ready as the Episcopalians to put down schism and heresy; the Reformed Liturgy was quite as orthodox, doctrinal, and theological as

<sup>1</sup> *Short History*, p. 623.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 564.

the Book of Common Prayer. Like the Prayer Book, it provided for the regular repetition of the Apostles' and Nicéne Creeds, 'and sometimes the Athanasian Creed.' This is conclusive that those who refused to assent and consent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer had no objection to profess and pronounce all the creeds. Exception was taken by some ministers to the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed, not out of respect for the feelings of the Socinians, but out of regard for the orthodox Eastern Church; they did not think that all the members of a Church, which was sound on the whole, ought to be damned for omitting a single controverted phrase, the *filioque*.

It is immaterial to our purpose why these ministers refused to conform. We have noticed their chief reasons,<sup>1</sup> and as they made them matters of conscience we can admire them for their adherence to principle; but it is not easy to see that for these reasons alone they are entitled to all the praise that has been lavished upon them. Had they really suffered in the cause of religious liberty it would have been a different matter, but liberty was as far from the thoughts of the Presbyterians as ever.

The State establishment of religion, it appears to me, necessarily carries with it the enactment of

<sup>1</sup> They objected to re-ordination, the use of the surplice, the sign of the cross in baptism, and kneeling at the sacrament. They wanted more preaching and longer prayers.

uniformity, and as the Presbyterians were in favour of an establishment, they could not, with reason, object to the principle of uniformity. Neither did they; it was only as to the kind of uniformity they differed from the Prelatists. They had their own scheme, which was defeated, and they had to put up with the consequence of their own principles when applied to themselves by others.

It may be thought from this that I do not appear to have much sympathy with these ejected ministers, and upon this ground alone I cannot say that I have. On the whole, their ejection was a good thing, if not for themselves, for the cause of religious liberty. 'Fortunately,' says Green, 'the great severance of St. Bartholomew's Day drove out the Presbyterians from the Church to which they clung and forced them into a general union with sects which they had hated till then almost as bitterly as the bishops themselves.'<sup>1</sup>

The real grievance of the ejected and silenced ministers was that which followed; not that they were not allowed to minister in the State Church, that seems a small matter to many of us, but that they were forbidden to minister at all. If toleration had been granted to Dissenters at once, many, if not all, of the ministers could have gathered congregations of their own followers about them and have found opportunities for usefulness, and a means of livelihood. It was not the Act of Uniformity that

<sup>1</sup> Green, p. 623.

bore so heavily upon them, but the prohibitions and persecutions which followed, under the Conventicle Acts, the Five Mile Act, and the Test Act. It was these repeated attempts to crush nonconformity and dissent which created the suffering of the Nonconformists; it is these which arouse our indignation and excite our sympathy with the sufferers; it is the loyalty of the Nonconformists to their principles under all these accumulated wrongs which calls for our admiration. Still, during all this time of trouble, from 1662 to 1687, doctrines were never called in question, except by a few Socinians who were banned by Conformists and Nonconformists alike. The Declaration of 1687, the Revolution of 1688, and the Toleration Act of 1689, put an end to the sufferings of the Nonconformists and Dissenters, gave them liberty to worship in their own way, and permitted the permanent establishment of those forms of religion to be known henceforth as Protestant Dissent.

## V.

### THE PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.<sup>1</sup>

WE have thus far followed the progress of the Presbyterians and Nonconformists, and we have seen that the idea with which they have been credited, of rejecting all creeds and professions of faith, was one they never entertained. The opinion that they did so is due to a very simple cause, the throwing back into the seventeenth century a religious development which only occurred under changed conditions in the eighteenth; crediting the early Nonconformists with motives of which they never dreamed, and because it has happened that the results of some of their actions have been such as they could not have foreseen, giving them the credit of intending those results. They can only be looked upon as the fathers of religious liberty because they succeeded ultimately in obtaining a certain amount of liberty for themselves which they

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Protestant Dissenters' was established by, if it did not originate with, the Toleration Act—'an Act exempting Their Majesties' Protestant subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws.'

would have not allowed to others, and in so doing they paved the way for a further extension of liberty which the majority of them would have opposed. It was not for any abstract principle of liberty they left the Church; it was not for any abstract principle of liberty they suffered under the Stuarts; it was not for any abstract principle of liberty they set up their separate meeting-houses when the age of toleration gave them the opportunity, and it was with reluctance that the Presbyterians remained outside the National Church.

It has been said that the Protestant Dissenters desired to have Churches distinguished for their Christlike spirit rather than for their opinions; that they felt the creeds and confessions had turned the Church of Christ into a theological arena, and therefore they would have none of them.

It is worth while to see how far this ideal picture corresponds with the reality. The period with which we are now concerned is that which began with the Revolution of 1688 and ended with the Act against Occasional Conformity of 1711. After the latter date we shall find a fresh development brought about by the invasion of new ideas and the rising of a new generation; but that has nothing to do with our present story. We shall see what was the attitude of the Dissenters towards creeds and professions of faith; and we shall find them disputing hotly about doctrines, practically unconscious of liberal principles, and in many cases striving for inclusion in the Established Church.



The Prince of Orange, in the Declaration published at the time of his expedition into England, promised to endeavour to procure a union between the Church of England and all Protestant Dissenters; and as soon as William and Mary were proclaimed the dissenting ministers in and about London presented addresses to their Majesties in which they expressed their satisfaction with this Declaration. Dr. Bates, on their behalf, assured the King and Queen that the Dissenters would cordially embrace the terms of union. 'This,' says Calamy, 'was a public fact, and the speeches were afterwards printed, whereby the Dissenters in effect declared to all the world their readiness to yield to a coalition with the Established Church.'<sup>1</sup>

Instead of inclusion they ultimately had to be content with toleration, though they would have preferred the former. But they did not at this time remain outside the Church because they objected to creeds or professions of faith, but simply because, as in 1662, they objected to some of the forms in use in the Church. In *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters Represented and Argued* (1689) we are told: 'Whereas the religion profest in England is that of Reformed Christianity, some things are annexed to the allowed public worship which are acknowledged to be no parts thereof in themselves necessary, but which the *Dissenters* judge to be in some parts sinful.' This was the chief reason why they dis-

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment and Continuation*, p. 425.

sented from the Church. We are also told that after the passing of the Toleration Act 'they were easy and thankful,' notwithstanding the restrictions imposed upon them by that Act. They were not non-subscribers, as it is sometimes erroneously supposed, for we are distinctly told that 'the ministers of the several denominations subscribed to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, as the Act of Parliament required.'<sup>1</sup>

Their permanent exclusion from the Church of England having been thus settled, the Presbyterians and Independents conceived the happy idea of forming a union; and to promote this object certain 'Heads of Agreement' were, in 1690, 'resolved upon by the united ministers in and about London formerly called Presbyterian and Congregational.'<sup>2</sup> In these 'Heads of Agreement' we find great importance attached to doctrines. In Section I. (3) we read 'That none shall be admitted as members, in order to communion in all the special ordinances of the gospel, but such persons as are knowing and sound in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion.' And soundness in the fundamental doctrines is defined in Section VIII. 'As to what appertains to soundness of judgment in matters of faith, we esteem it sufficient that a Church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God, the

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, p. 469.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth the use of the name 'Presbyterian' is a mere survival; they were simply Dissenters.

perfect and only rule of faith and practice ; and own either the doctrinal parts of those commonly called the Articles of the Church of England, or the Confession or Catechism, larger or shorter, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster, or the Confession agreed on at the Savoy, to be agreeable to the said rule.’<sup>1</sup>

However, these Protestant Dissenters, who, we are told, cared nothing for creeds and confessions of faith, could not continue to agree because of their doctrinal differences. In 1694 ‘papers passed between the two parties called Presbyterian and Congregational, in order to a renunciation of Arminian errors on the one hand and Antinomian on the other.’ The temporary union broke up, ‘and things seemed likely to grow worse than better.’

It must be remembered that the division was not on denominational lines ; differences of opinion existed amongst the Independents as well as amongst the Presbyterians.

Things did grow worse, and Calamy tells us how these Dissenters plunged into a new ‘theological arena’ and conducted themselves in the good old orthodox fashion by quarrelling about their creeds. In 1695 ‘the Dissenters continued their doctrinal contentions. An attempt was now made for a reunion among them. There was an offer, on one side to renounce Arminianism if the other side would but renounce Antinomianism ; but this did not succeed.

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 482.

A little after, a few particular ministers of both sorts privately drew up a paper, with a design to get both sides to sign it. But this created new heats, instead of extinguishing the old ones.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in the next year 'the Dissenters continued divided, and a second and third paper were drawn up in order to the settlement of matters, but in vain. *It looked as if the creed-making age were again revived.*'<sup>2</sup>

That the spirit of religion suffered by these doctrinal contentions is unhappily true, and the usual results followed in the shape of ill-feeling and personal detraction on both sides. In 1698 'the old differences yet continued among the Dissenters about doctrinal matters. There now came out a *Defence of the Report concerning the Present State of the Differences in Doctrine between some Dissenting Ministers in London*, in reply to a book entitled *A Faithful Rebuke of that Report*, and it was soon followed with a *Vindication of the Faithful Rebuke of a False Report against rude Cavels of the Pretended Defence*; and that was also followed with a pamphlet entitled *A View of an Ecclesiastic in his Socks and Buskins; or, a Just Reprimand given by Mr. Alsop for his Foppish, Pedantic, Detractive, and Petulant Way of Writing*. He that will be at the pains to read over what was published on this occasion will see cause to pity the Dissenters, who pelted one another with hard names and severe reflections.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 549. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 550. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 561, 562.

I have not recalled these prolonged contentions of the Protestant Dissenters with any intention of disparaging them, but only to show that the first era of dissent was not that scene of concord, liberality, and the rule of a Christlike spirit which some people suppose. Calamy lets the curtain fall upon this scene by saying: 'As it is a great matter of lamentation that they should spend the reign of such a prince as King William in party quarrels, so it is to be hoped that the sense of the ill-consequences that attended their so doing will be a caution to them in future.'<sup>1</sup>

This brings us down to 1701. The Dissenters having become a little wiser, 'more calm and cool,' their dissensions appear to have ceased for the time. By occasional conformity some of them kept on terms with the Church. Some conformed altogether, and most of them still indulged in hopes of comprehension. The Act of 1711 against occasional conformity put a final end to this dream. 'So far are we from any hopes of a coalition, which has been so often talked of, that nothing will do but an entire submission. Consciences truly scrupulous may indeed have their liberty,' and that was all;<sup>2</sup> and so ended another chapter in the history of Protestant Dissent. So far we find no indifference on the part of the Dissenters to doctrines, creeds, and confessions of faith, no objection to subscription, nor any idea of religious freedom in our sense of the word.

<sup>1</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 565.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 725.

There is no need to pursue this part of the subject further. The Protestant Dissenting ministers from 1689 to 1712 were not distinguished by any dislike of doctrine or by any love of liberty, they were all subscribers, ardent defenders of their own opinions, and often, if not generally, bigoted and intolerant. This will be found to have significance when we come to consider the founding of the meeting-houses, for all these contentions were going on during the chapel-building period. It was not until after 1712, when the last hopes of a coalition with the Established Church were destroyed, and the Test Acts enforced by a prohibition of occasional conformity, that the liberal movement in theology really began to influence some of the Protestant Dissenters, and to whom this was due we shall see hereafter.

There are two classes of the Dissenters who are often regarded as standing apart from the rest by reason of their greater doctrinal freedom and liberality. These were the Baxterians and the Presbyterians. The first will only require a passing notice, the second call for more particular consideration. The principal characteristic of the Baxterians was that they agreed with Baxter and did not hold the orthodox doctrines of the Presbyterians and Independents. Baxter was all for the middle course, moderation or compromise, and as in theology he stood midway between high Calvinism and Arminianism, so in the matter of Church government he is regarded as standing halfway between Episcopal-

ianism and dissent, though his preference for an Episcopal Church cannot be denied. He disclaimed the name of Presbyterian because he knew, so much better than some historians, that he was not a Presbyterian. His followers came to be known as Baxterians, or Moderate Dissenters. This term, 'Moderate Dissenters,' puzzles some people, but it is clearly to be understood in this connection. They were the Dissenters, or, more properly, the Non-conformists, who were not opposed, as the Independents were, to the State establishment of religion. They only remained outside the Church of England because they disliked some things in the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>1</sup> If these objectionable particulars could have been removed, they would have re-entered the Church. Preaching before the Parliament upon the last day of April, 1660, Baxter had said: 'As for matters of Church government it was easy for moderate men to come to a fair agreement, and that the late Archbishop of Armagh and he had agreed in half-an-hour's discourse.'<sup>2</sup> The Baxterians were not held in much respect by the stiffer-backed Dissenters, who looked upon them as wanting in principle. Calamy himself tells a story to that effect. On one occasion he preached at

<sup>1</sup> It ought to be borne in mind that the Book of Common Prayer contains not only forms of devotion and statements of doctrine, but also the forms of the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England.

<sup>2</sup> Calamy, p. 195.

Andover, in a chapel jointly occupied by Independents and Presbyterians, who each had their own minister. The Independents were in want of a pastor, and an elderly lady pressed Calamy to become their minister. He recommended them to avail themselves of the services of Mr. Sprint, the Presbyterian. Calamy goes on to say: 'The old woman seemed perfectly astonished at my proposal, and cried out, "What! Mr. Sprint? old Mr. Sprint? Alas, he is a *Baxterian*! he is a *middle-way man*! he is an *occasional Conformist*!"'<sup>1</sup> Baxterianism was not a movement, nor a permanent form of dissent, it was simply the term used for describing individuals who had ceased to hold the Calvinistic doctrines in all their rigidity, but did not openly confess the change in their opinions.<sup>2</sup>

With the passing of the Act against occasional conformity the Presbyterians who did not conform became merged in the general body of Dissenters. As long as they believed comprehension to be possible, we can understand that they remained, in a measure, distinct from the Independents and other Dissenters; when comprehension was finally done with, the Presbyterian congregations which survived

<sup>1</sup> *Calamy's Life and Times.*

<sup>2</sup> 'John Fox says the Baxterians rejected the notions of true Calvinists, but were terribly afraid of being called or thought Arminians.'—*Monthly Repository*, xxi., p. 259.



permanently adopted the Congregational form. They were henceforth Presbyterian only in name.<sup>1</sup>

In order to distinguish them from the real Presbyterians they are sometimes called 'English Presbyterians,' but I cannot find that they ever adopted this as a designation ; down to the present day where the name survives they are simply known as Presbyterian, and if the qualification 'English' is used in a particular sense, it is a purely modern innovation. There do not appear to have been, at any time during the last century, any congregations, or associations of congregations, or ministers, who called themselves 'English Presbyterian.' It is merely a descriptive term, and is even more applicable to the Presbyterians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The chief difference between the Presbyterians and the other two denominations was in their attitude to the Established Church. As long as there was a possibility of comprehension, the Presbyterians naturally refrained from committing themselves in any way which would have endangered the possibility of a coalition, and it was amongst them that the occasional Conformists were found. When the hopes of a coalition were over, the Presbyterians were without a policy, and were simply carried along by the original impetus. To all intents and

<sup>1</sup> The Protestant Dissenters who had the minimum of Church organization and discipline, and to whom no name is so inappropriate, were nevertheless frequently called Presbyterian.

purposes they became Congregational, but something of the old Presbyterian spirit survived in the more autocratic assumption of the ministers. They inherited the tradition of the divine right of presbyters, and though they could only exercise their authority in their own congregations or assemblies, it gave them a different stamp from the ministers of Independent congregations. The Church believed in the divine right of the bishops; the Presbyterians believed in the divine right of the presbyters;<sup>1</sup> the Congregationalists believed in the divine right of the congregation. The difference between the Presbyterian Dissenters and the Congregationalists was more theoretical than real, but it was sufficient to keep them distinct for a time. Apart from such characteristics as these, no line of demarcation can be drawn between the three denominations, except in the case of the Baptists, who were opposed to the baptism of infants. Some Presbyterians were liberal, others were not so, but exactly the same may be said of the Independents and Baptists of the time; in fact, the Baptists were ultra-Independents, and were the earliest to manifest toleration for heretical opinions amongst themselves.<sup>2</sup> The natural

<sup>1</sup> John Fox says of Mr. Hallett: 'He had high notions of the ministerial power, and thought that power was derived from the Apostles who had their commission from Christ, etc.'—*Monthly Repository*, 1821, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of Matthew Caffyn. Turner, writing of the Baptist Congregation, Barbican, of which Foster and Burroughs were the ministers, says: 'In general liberality of views they

development of all three denominations ought to have been the same, and up to a certain point it was. The Presbyterian congregations declined in number as they no longer had an attainable ideal, and there was less reason for their maintenance of permanent separate congregations than amongst the Independents and Baptists. Towards the latter part of the eighteenth century the theological progress of the majority of the congregations was arrested by the Evangelical revival, but by that time a number of the oldest congregations, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist alike, had become anti-Trinitarian. The Evangelical Dissenters became distinctly separated from the liberals, and those who were not Baptist called themselves Congregational, while the anti-Trinitarians were frequently called Presbyterian whether they were originally so or not. The name had lost its original meaning, and came to be used to signify unorthodox Dissenters.<sup>1</sup>

Liberal theology certainly did not originate with the Presbyterians; the Latitudinarians were an influential section of the Church of England clergy; Matthew Caffyn and James Foster were Baptists; Manning,

appear to have taken the lead, in some respects, of most of the London Presbyterian churches of the day. This was the only dissenting congregation in London whose ministers thought proper to invite the services of the venerable Emlyn.'—*Turner's Lives*, p. 192.

<sup>1</sup> 'Presbyterian and Socinian are synonymous terms.'—Hook, *Church Dictionary*.

Lardner, and Caleb Fleming were Congregational. Doctrinal freedom was not a principle with the Presbyterians, and the inference drawn from the action of some of them at the Salters' Hall Synod is an erroneous one. It was the intolerance of the Devonshire Presbyterian ministers<sup>1</sup> which occasioned this famous conference. Murch's opinion on this matter is so emphatic that I must give it in full. 'It is impossible,' he says, 'for any enlightened Dissenters of the present day to look back upon the inquisitorial proceedings of the Exeter Assembly during the interval in question, particularly in reference to the opinions of Stogdon, Peirce, and Hallet, without acknowledging that the members violated the plainest principles of Christian liberty, acted inconsistently with their own professions as Protestant Dissenters, and employed their unwarrantable power in promoting, not "the ends of religion," but "envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness."' He continues: 'The minutes of the Assembly from the year 1721 to the present time are preserved. They afford no indication of improvement in the spirit or objects of the association for upwards of thirty years. Their proceedings were similar, in many respects, to those of the presbyteries of their forefathers, which, there is reason to believe, many of the members would have gladly revived.'<sup>2</sup> Caleb Fleming began his ministry

<sup>1</sup> 'The old forms of Presbyterian church government were at that time retained to a greater extent in Devonshire than in any other part of the country.'—*Turner's Lives*, Vol. I., p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Murch, p. 551.

among the Presbyterians, and was ordained as minister to the congregation in Bartholomew Close, London. At his ordination he refused to submit to the imposition of hands, and his confession of faith was to the effect 'that he believed the New Testament writings to contain a revelation worthy of God to give and of man to receive, and that it should be his endeavour to recommend them to the people in the sense in which he should, from time to time, understand them.'<sup>1</sup>

This was undoubtedly claiming a large allowance of liberty, but not more than the Presbyterians are credited with; but it was more than they approved.

'It may, however, be doubted whether the freedom thus exercised was in all respects acceptable to some of those who had invited him to be their minister, and in whom the old leaven of Presbyterianism, as it had existed a century before in all its rigour, may not yet have been altogether worked out. They may, perhaps, have been startled at the entire overthrow of the barriers against the intrusion of unsound teachers, established by ancient institutions, of which only the shadow of the name was now retained, and also at the liberty asserted by their new minister, not only preaching whatever he then thought right, but of changing those doctrines from time to time, as further inquiries opened to him new views of Scripture truth.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Turner's *Lives*, Vol. I., p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 284.

The timid were alarmed, the bigoted offended, and large numbers of the congregation withdrew. Fleming remained there for some years however, until he was chosen as successor to Dr. Foster, at Pinners' Hall.

These instances are sufficient to show that the Presbyterians of the early part of the eighteenth century were no more in favour of religious and doctrinal liberty than the other denominations.

One effect of the English Presbyterian theory is the tendency, amongst those who like to trace their descent from the Presbyterians, to ignore the services rendered to religious liberty by the Independents and the Baptists. A number of old congregations, originally Calvinist, became Arminian, and finally Unitarian. It is the custom to describe all these old congregations as Presbyterian, and to assume that the credit of this development is due to them exclusively.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, many of these congregations were Independent or Baptist; to some extent the Baptist origin is still remembered, but the Independents are forgotten and classed as Presbyterian. For instance, Murch includes the Gloucester congregation amongst the Presbyterian churches of the West of England, but it never was Presbyterian. It was formed before 1660 by James Forbes, whom Calamy describes as Congregational, and the circum-

<sup>1</sup> Many Congregational and even Church historians encourage this idea, apparently in their anxiety to disassociate their denominations from Unitarianism.

stances under which the Church was formed, as related by Mr. Forbes himself, fully justifies this description. Forbes was first appointed as a lecturer in Gloucester in 1654, and his appointment was approved by Oliver Cromwell. There are other churches, Independent in their origin, which are incorrectly classed as Presbyterian.

It appears also to be forgotten that many of the leading liberal Dissenters of the last century most emphatically refused to be called Presbyterian;<sup>1</sup> the name certainly had no pleasant associations for them.<sup>2</sup> When a distinct cleavage occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century between the liberal and orthodox Dissenters, the opposing parties were not known as Presbyterian and Independent, but as Unitarian and Evangelical, as they are at the present time.

*Note.*—‘ENGLISH PRESBYTERIANISM.’

THE use of the Presbyterian name amongst Protestant Dissenters was practically obsolete at the beginning of the present century,<sup>3</sup> but twenty-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. John Taylor, for instance.

<sup>2</sup> ‘It is an honour to the English Protestant dissenters of this day, and a ground of devout thankfulness, that Presbyterianism hath no existence amongst them. They who, very improperly, are called Presbyterians, as consistent Protestants, and as genuine advocates of liberty, have no rivals and but few equals.’  
—Dr. Toulmin, *Life of Biddle*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> ‘That of Presbyterian, it is allowed on all hands, is obsolete and irrelevant.’—*Monthly Repository*, 1809, p. 667.

‘Let us not say, therefore, that Presbyterian Congregations

five years later it was revived, with the addition of the epithet 'English,' and has since been widely adopted and claimed as a denominational name by many Unitarians. It appears prominently in connection with the two famous lawsuits known as the Wolverhampton Chapel Case and the Lady Hewley Charities Case. The Wolverhampton case, as relating to a congregation, is most to the point. This congregation, towards the end of the last century, like many others, became Unitarian. In 1813 a minister was appointed whose views accorded with those of the congregation. He was appointed for three years, but at the end of that time he had changed his opinions and preached Trinitarianism. The trustees wished him to retire, but he refused to do so, and remained in possession of the chapel for some years, maintained by an orthodox party who had joined him. The Unitarians, with the majority of the trustees, built another chapel, and the trust funds were retained by them and used, as they believed, in a legal manner. After the lapse of some years, the orthodox party occupying the old chapel instituted a suit for the recovery of the trust funds. The Vice-Chancellor gave a decree adverse to the Unitarians in this case, and the Unitarians occupying ancient meeting-houses throughout the

have declined, but that they have merely disappeared.'—*Ibid.*, 1810, p. 229.

'English Presbyterians are now in fact extinct, the name only remaining.'—*Protestant Dissenters' Catechism*.



country were threatened with a general attack, and saw before them the prospect of unlimited litigation.

How seriously this attack was regarded by the Unitarians may be inferred from an incident which Mr. R. D. Darbishire has related in a letter recently addressed to the present writer.

Mr. Darbishire says:—‘I distinctly recollect meetings in our sitting-room of several friends, mostly out of the Rev. J. J. Tayler’s congregation, who met to consider gravely what the consequences of an adverse decision<sup>1</sup> might be. It was said that Mr. George Hadfield, the Coryphæus of the Independent persecuting measures, had declared that he would have Cross Street Chapel next, and, indeed, he was accused of having visited it to choose which seat he would appropriate. I was about sixteen years of age then. The plan was gravely discussed of a small company seeking freedom in the New World as others had done before. I can even now see the maps of Texas spread out on the piano and various emigrant guides on the table!’

‘The Dissenters’ Chapels Act saved our chapels and our exile, but the project was a real and inspiring idea, and left me personally stronger and freer for the rest of my life.’

Under these circumstances the Unitarians determined upon a line of defence, which was that the congregations, as direct descendants from the ‘English Presbyterian’ founders of the chapels, were

<sup>1</sup> In the Lady Hewley case.

entitled to the chapels and endowments irrespective of the doctrines which were taught, because the Presbyterian founders had intentionally left the trusts 'open' to provide for all future developments of doctrine. In 1834 an 'English Presbyterian Association' was formed by Unitarians for the defence of their rights and for the dissemination of information relating to the history and principles of the English Presbyterians.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of this legend, for legend and not history it most certainly is, appears to be about ten years older, and arose in the course of the 'Socinian controversy' in Manchester in 1824.<sup>2</sup> This controversy was provoked by a speech delivered by the Rev. George Harris at a dinner given in Manchester to the Rev. John Grundy, minister of Cross Street Chapel, in August, 1824. Mr. Harris, in this speech, made some observations which offended the orthodox Dissenters, and led to a long correspondence in the *Manchester Gazette* of a somewhat heated character. Early in the controversy the Unitarians were accused of misappropriating the chapels and endowments and perverting them from the use for which they were intended by their orthodox founders and donors. There then appeared upon the scene a correspondent

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Reformer*, 1834, p. 164. This Association at once published *The History, Opinions, and Present Legal Position of the English Presbyterians*.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Manchester Socinian Controversy, with Introductory Remarks, &c.*, 1825.

who signed himself 'An English Presbyterian'<sup>1</sup> (Mr. G. W. Wood). This writer introduced the particular line of defence which became so prominent ten years later. That this is somewhere near the root of the matter we learn from a letter written by James Turner in reply. In this letter Mr. Turner says:—"Before this discussion commenced the words Presbyterian and Presbyterianism were pretty well consigned to the shades. Is this the appellation they usually give to their people or their chapels? I have not happened to see it for many years before the present revival. At the ever memorable dinner, for instance, everything was Unitarian, nothing Presbyterian. The persons were "a very numerous and respectable body of gentlemen professing *Unitarian* Christianity. The occasion of the meeting was 'the cause of *Unitarian* Christianity.'" The inscription on the plate presented (to Mr. Grundy) speaks indeed of a "chapel in Cross Street, Manchester," but it is not stated to be *Presbyterian*; it is the cause of *Unitarian* Christianity that has been "advocated in it." When the present minister of Cross Street Chapel mentions himself and his brethren in his speech, they are all "*Unitarian* ministers." An English Presbyterian in that happy company, I trow, would have been an outlandish character indeed. But now the word Presbyterian is, at once, the object of your correspondent's fondest care and the rock of his defence.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Manchester Socinian Controversy*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 92.

This, then, as I have said above, seems to me to have been the first appearance of the theory, which was further developed by the English Presbyterian Association in 1834, and has been accepted almost without question ever since.

The case of the Unitarians would have been much stronger had they simply stood upon their rights as Protestant Dissenters, especially as some of the congregations concerned were of Independent or Baptist origin. The reason of their selection of Presbyterian is easily seen when it is remembered that the attack was threatened by Congregationalists, who claimed to be the representatives of the old Independents. The marked divergence between the Unitarians and the Congregationalists at the time of the suits referred to suggested the contention that there was the same, or an analogous, divergence two hundred years ago between the Presbyterians and Independents, notwithstanding, as we have seen, that at that time toleration and congregational liberty were Independent and not Presbyterian principles. As a matter of fact, in the first quarter of the last century some of the so-called Presbyterian congregations had adopted Independent principles, and a hundred years later the Congregationalists had departed from them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'To the early Independents the honour is due of having first carried into effect tolerant principles, and had they always adhered to them their late proceedings in the Court of Chancery had not been witnessed.'—*History, Opinions, &c., of the English Presbyterians*, p. 7.

In the re-hearing of the Wolverhampton Chapel Case, before the Lord Chancellor (Lord Cottenham), in 1836, the counsel for the defence, the Solicitor-General (Sir R. M. Rolfe), and Mr. Booth worked the 'Presbyterian' theory for all it was worth. The reason of this appeal to 'history' was that the plaintiffs contended that the doctrines held by the congregation at the time of the foundation of the chapel could alone be legally preached in it or supported by the trust funds; it was, therefore, in the interest of the defendants to show that, whatever their own opinions might have been, the founders were animated by such liberal principles as would justify their successors in holding and preaching any doctrines which in the course of time they might adopt.

The principal evidence adduced in support of this theory was some citations from the writings of the great 'Presbyterian' leader, Richard Baxter, and references to the opinions expressed by some of the ministers who took part in the Salters' Hall Synod in 1719.

Another argument which has been made much of since was that, as the founders of the old chapels which were or were likely to be the subjects of litigation had abstained from including any declaration of doctrines in their trust deeds, it was clearly their intention to leave succeeding ministers and congregations free.

The arguments referred to above assume that

the 'English Presbyterians' were differentiated from the other denominations by a greater love of religious and doctrinal freedom, but this, as I have already shown and shall show still more clearly in succeeding chapters, is what cannot be maintained, though it has been repeated over and over again with ever-increasing assurance. Before the law they were all alike Protestant Dissenters, and they were all equally pledged, or rather not pledged, to liberty, and they were all equally interested in the maintenance of their own doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

Before quitting English Presbyterianism, and to save the necessity of returning to the subject, it may be useful to give a short account of the Lady Hewley's Charities Case, which is of great historical importance to Protestant Dissenters, and to Unitarians especially, for it was in consequence of the issue of this case, and the waste of time and money involved in it, that the 'Unitarian Charter'—the Dissenters' Chapels Act—was passed by the Legislature.

<sup>1</sup> 'I have heard a great deal and read a great deal about the extreme anxiety which was manifested by the Presbyterians and the Independents and the Baptists (I think the three principal bodies of dissenters) to have their societies unfettered by what they call creeds; but I cannot but myself think that in their minds it was of much more importance that there should be certain religious opinions inculcated upon the minds of their hearers than simply that they should be at liberty to preach what they pleased.'—The Vice Chancellor, *Wolverhampton Case Report*, p. 110. Murch says, referring to Peirce and Hallett: 'They dared to inquire and think for themselves, when it was the universal custom to be guided implicitly by established formularies.'—*Presbyterian Churches, &c.*, p. 399.

Sir John Hewley was a representative of York in the House of Commons for a time during the reign of Charles II. He and his wife were people of considerable wealth, and warm supporters of the Nonconformists. After the passing of the Toleration Act, Sir John and Lady Hewley were among the principal contributors to the erection of Saint Saviour Gate Chapel, York. Being left a widow and having no children, Lady Hewley, who died in 1710, before the close of her life determined to devote a considerable part of her estate for the benefit of dissenting ministers. For this purpose she created a trust, the principal objects of which were (1) the granting of stipends to 'poor and godly preachers of Christ's Holy Gospel'; (2) the granting of relief to the widows of such poor preachers; (3) the assistance of young men being educated for the ministry.

For more than a hundred years no question had been publicly raised as to the way in which this trust was administered, but after the Manchester Socinian Controversy the Evangelical Congregationalists in the North of England, who had already directed their attention to this charity, instituted proceedings in the Court of Chancery for the removal of the trustees. This was in the year 1830. The grounds upon which the trustees were objected to were that they had granted assistance out of the charity to Unitarian ministers, who, it was contended, were not 'preachers of Christ's Holy

Gospel.' The fact was admitted, the accounts for 1829 showing that assistance had been granted to 237 ministers, exclusive of the minister of Saint Saviour Gate Chapel, of whom thirty-eight were known to hold Unitarian opinions.<sup>1</sup>

The case was heard before the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Lancelot Shadwell, who, in December, 1833, gave his decision in favour of the plaintiffs, and ordered that the trustees should be removed.

The case for the trustees was principally based upon the 'English Presbyterian' theory, it being contended that Lady Hewley was a Presbyterian, and that she intended her benefactions for Presbyterian ministers without regard to their religious opinions. It does not appear from the terms of the trust that she intended, nor did the trustees understand her as intending, to restrict the benefits to Presbyterians; the phrase 'poor and godly preachers' has a much wider application, and was evidently intended to include Dissenters generally, and Independent and Baptist ministers received grants from the funds.

The evidence given in the suit was principally of a doctrinal character, as to the religious sentiments of different classes of Dissenters, as to the doctrines of Bowles's Catechism, and also respecting the works published by the British and Foreign

<sup>1</sup> *History and Opinions of English Presbyterians* p. 119—The number of Unitarians is probably understated.



Unitarian Association, to which some of the trustees were subscribers.<sup>1</sup>

The reference to Bowles's Catechism needs to be explained. In 1707 Lady Hewley conveyed certain property to trustees as an hospital or almhouse for nine poor women and one poor man. Amongst the rules for the management and direction of the hospital were these: 'That the persons admitted be poor and piously disposed and of the Protestant religion,' and 'That every almsbody be one that can repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and Mr. Edward Bowles's Catechism.'

This Catechism, which was alleged to be un-Calvinistic, was introduced into the case as showing, not only the sentiments of which Lady Hewley approved, but also to prove that a variety of opinions on doctrinal matters existed amongst the Presbyterians at the time of the settlement of these trusts; for of course Mr. Bowles was claimed as a Presbyterian. This Mr. Bowles had been a person of considerable importance in York in the middle of the seventeenth century, and after the capitulation of York to the Parliamentary Army he was appointed one of the four ministers maintained by the Corporation to preach in the Minster and parish churches. He was active about the Restoration, and accompanied Lord Fairfax and the Commissioners to Breda to prepare the way for the return of Charles II. It is said that after the Restoration

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. and Opinions of English Presbyterians* p.135.

the Deanery of York was offered him if he would conform; declining this, he was excluded from the Minster, but continued to preach in the parish churches of the city. Calamy states that Drs. Tillotson and Stillingfleet spent a whole afternoon with him in the endeavour to persuade him to conform, but in vain. Being asked in his last illness 'What of conformity he disliked?' he answered, 'The whole.' From this reply we should infer that Bowles had left the Presbyterians behind, and was more in sympathy with the Independents. He died in 1662.

It has been said that in the seventeenth century catechisms were as plentiful as blackberries in September, and amongst many others Mr. Bowles composed a *Plain and Short Catechism*, which Lady Hewley, more than fifty years afterwards, selected as suitable for the objects of her charity to repeat. The inference is that Lady Hewley was the generous patron of all Dissenters, and not of the Presbyterians exclusively.

The contention that the Presbyterians were more liberal than other Dissenters, and therefore because Lady Hewley was a Presbyterian the trustees were justified in including Unitarians in the charity, could not be proved and could not be sustained.

The real justification of the conduct of the trustees was that the Unitarian preachers, as Protestant Dissenters, were entitled to enjoy the full benefit of the extension of toleration which the

Legislature had granted from time to time. This was the opinion of some legal authorities at the time, though the judgment of the Court of Chancery was against it.

It had been contended that whether or not Lady Hewley might possibly regard Unitarians as fit recipients of her bounty, their system of belief was, at the date of the deed, contrary to law, the Act of Toleration expressly excluding from its benefits impugnors of the doctrine of the Trinity; that her intention, therefore, in so far as it embraced Unitarians, was unlawful and, therefore, void. 'There is at least a good answer to the argument, as affecting parties in our own time, that as a statute repealed must be considered as if it never existed, so this part of the Act of Toleration, being repealed by 53 Geo. III. c. 160, the purpose which was for a time unlawful, as contrary to the provision of the former, became lawful at the moment of repeal, and Unitarians, from that date (1813) at least, became fitting objects of the charity.'<sup>1</sup>

It was the ultimate recognition of this principle which led to the passing of the Act of 1844, which was intended to put a stop to this kind of litigation.

The Hewley trustees appealed against the decision of the Vice-Chancellor, but it was upheld by the Lord Chancellor; the case was then carried to the House of Lords, where it was argued for fifteen

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Law Magazine*, 1836. See *Christian Reformer*, 1836, p. 417.

days, and in August, 1842, the Lords confirmed the judgment of the court below, and the trustees were discharged from their trust as not being entitled to the benefits of the charity. The case did not actually end there, for several claimants came forward—the Independents, Presbyterians, and others—and the matter was still unsettled in 1844, when the Lord Chancellor stated that the costs had amounted to nearly £30,000.<sup>1</sup>

It was only natural that this litigation, initiated by Independents, should intensify the unfriendly feeling which for several years had been growing between the Unitarians and other Dissenters, and in 1836 the Unitarian Presbyterian ministers, with the exception of the Rev. James Yates, formally withdrew from the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the three Denominations in and about the cities of London and Westminster. The crisis was brought about in this body by the removal, by the votes of the majority, of the Presbyterian Thomas Rees, LL.D., from the secretaryship.<sup>2</sup>

This general body was organised in 1727, when the three bodies of dissenting ministers, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist, in and about London and Westminster, formed themselves into a united body for the maintenance of civil and religious liberty upon the grounds of mutual tolera-

<sup>1</sup> The Lord Chancellor's Speech, *Debates*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> For full accounts of the proceedings on both sides see *Christian Reformer*, 1836.

tion and a regard for the independence, rights, and privileges of each separate body. In 1836 the Unitarians felt, not unnaturally, that the compact had been violated by the proceedings of the other Dissenters, and therefore severed the connection which had existed for more than one hundred years. The general body was not dissolved by the withdrawal, as the Unitarians at first declared it to be, but affirmed it was unaffected by it; three ministers of Scottish Presbyterian congregations in London, who had been admitted 'by courtesy,' remained, and were afterwards joined by others, now generally known as the Presbyterian Church of England, which has no connection with the old dissent, so that the General Body of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the three Denominations in and about London and Westminster still exists, with a difference.

The seceders formed themselves into a separate association, or, it might be more correct to say, they again became a separate body as they were before 1727, though in greatly diminished numbers. When the union was formed the Presbyterians numbered seventy-three; in 1836 the Unitarian Presbyterians who withdrew numbered only twelve.<sup>1</sup> They resumed the title of the Body of Presbyterian Ministers in and about the cities of London and Westminster.

<sup>1</sup> 'The congregations which, acting in concert with the ministers, withdrew their lay representatives from the Dissenting Deputies, were only eight.'—*Christian Reformer*, 1836, p. 478.

The body is still in existence, and has since been augmented by the inclusion of additional Unitarian ministers.<sup>1</sup>

This Body of Presbyterian Ministers joined with the members of the English Presbyterian Association and others in the formation of a Presbyterian Union, and to a committee formed in 1842 by this Union and deputies from Ireland and the provinces, of which Mr. G. W. Wood and subsequently Mr. Mark Philips<sup>2</sup> was chairman, must be assigned the honour of promoting and securing the enactment of the Bill for the protection of Unitarians and others known as the Dissenters' Chapels Bill. After this measure of justice was secured the Presbyterian Union appears to have been dissolved, and the English Presbyterian Association has long since passed out of existence.

<sup>1</sup> It is curious to note that its two present secretaries are ministers of congregations (Essex Church and Brixton) which cannot by any stretch of imagination be regarded as Presbyterian. They are both of unquestionable Unitarian origin.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Wood died in 1843.

## VI.

### THE MEETING-HOUSES.

**B**ETWEEN the passing of the Toleration Act and the death of Queen Anne the Protestant Dissenters built somewhere about a thousand new meeting-houses for the purpose of public worship. Comparatively few of these original chapels are now in existence. In many instances they have been replaced by new buildings, but very many have disappeared altogether or have been converted to other uses. In most instances where the congregations survive, whether they are still orthodox or not, they have had a continuous existence from that time to the present.

The old meeting-houses which are still in existence are chiefly interesting on account of their associations. They are representative of the piety and enthusiasm of the Dissenters in the early years of their toleration, and they are in a manner symbolic of their religious ideas. In most cases it is easy to see that no large sum of money was spent upon them. A piece of land was acquired or given

by some well-to-do member of the congregation, and upon this the unpretentious structure was reared. The last thing the builders thought of was anything in the way of erecting a church which should either externally or internally present any imposing or attractive features. If at the present time these old meeting-houses appear quaint or interesting, it is due to some characteristics which are purely accidental, or, and this more often, it is simply on account of their age alone. The last thing, it appears to me, that the original congregation would have thought of would have been any reverence for the building in which they worshipped. What they required was simply a meeting-house ; a house, and not a church, where families could meet for common worship and for edification. The exteriors, therefore, commonly resembled a large brick-built cottage of the period, while the interior was simply an open space like a hall or barn. Architectural features they had none. Galleries were erected, sometimes at one end only, but often at the sides as well, according to the accommodation required. The pews were roomy and the partitions high, evidently, as far as possible, to protect the occupants from the cold in days when a heating apparatus for large buildings was unknown. The feature of the meeting-house was the pulpit, over which was suspended a sounding-board to prevent the diffusion of the preacher's voice or the tendency to reverberation, otherwise unavoidable in buildings in which there was nothing



to deflect the sound. The pews were arranged so that every occupant could see the preacher and every ear catch his words. In cathedrals and churches the choir or chancel first attracts the eye ; in the meeting-house it is the pulpit. And the difference is important. In the Church, ceremonies and singing form the greater part of the proceedings ; in the Meeting-house, praying and preaching. For more than a hundred years the Puritans or Nonconformists had pleaded for a *preaching* ministry ; one of their chief complaints had been that worship in the church was performed by singing men and boys. Their efforts to reform the church in the manner they desired had been in vain, but the meeting-house and its pulpit was a realisation of their ideal in a humble form. In spite of the scorn that was lavished upon the preaching ministers by the satirists of the seventeenth century, England owes much to them ; and the congregations which first assembled in the meeting-houses were the fathers of the Nonconformists, who have done so much for religion, freedom, and morals during the last two centuries.

Nevertheless, they, or some of them, are often credited with larger and more generous ideas of religious liberty than they really entertained. 'They builded better than they knew,' and very erroneous inferences have, in recent years, been drawn from some of their proceedings, and especially from the matter-of-fact and business-like way in which the

majority of the trust deeds of these meeting-houses were drawn up; and it has also been assumed that those who, as Dr. Toulmin said, were improperly called Presbyterians, deliberately and of set purpose adopted a more open form of trust than the other Dissenters, that they intentionally made use of this form so that the ministers and congregations of these places of worship should at the time and for ever be free from all doctrinal limitations or restrictions, and this is put forward as the chief evidence that the Presbyterians were governed by more liberal ideas than other Dissenters. This is a very important consideration, and requires careful examination. It was insisted upon very strongly by the counsel for the Unitarian defendants in the Wolverhampton Chapel Case, and has been generally accepted without question by Unitarians. Mr. Booth said:—‘The period at which this chapel was founded (1700) is one that may be described as a *transition period*. There had been a great declension from orthodoxy, as appears in the controversial writers of that time. The question had been mooted whether they should check the further declension by the imposition of tests. The *English Presbyterians* came to the determination that they would resist that imposition—that they would assert for themselves and their successors the liberty which had been left them in the Bible. They founded their chapels on that principle, and they must abide by it.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wolverhampton Case, *Report*, p. 108.

If this opinion were peculiar to this one case it might soon be disposed of; but it is an article of faith with many Unitarians that the early chapel trust deeds which contain no reference to doctrines were so framed, because the framers of them, or those for whom they were drawn up, were anxious to provide in this way for future developments of truth, and that they deliberately abstained from binding themselves and their successors in the interests of religious liberty.

Joined with this is often another article of faith, that it was the 'English Presbyterians' alone who showed this regard for the future. There is no difficulty in finding instances of this opinion.

'While they (the Presbyterians) still adhered personally to the Westminster confession, they dedicated their chapels simply to the worship of Almighty God, and thus left the future open to the influence of enlarging knowledge and growing insight into the divine purposes.'<sup>1</sup>

'The Presbyterians refused to have any creeds connected with their places of worship, and instead of tying up their chapel property to those who should continue to hold the same doctrines, usually settled the trust deeds simply "for the worship of Almighty God."'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. James Drummond, *Proceedings and Addresses at Manchester New College, Oxford*, 1893, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Dr. Brooke Herford, *Story of Religion in England*, p. 294.

'These congregations did not choose to endow the doctrines they held at the time or to prescribe the future destination of the property. They trusted the future.' They 'were satisfied to provide for the future by such simple means as the "open trusts" to which we have referred.'<sup>1</sup>

'They (the Presbyterians) differed, however, from the other Nonconformist bodies by their refraining from insertion of elaborate creeds in the trust deeds of their chapel property.'<sup>2</sup>

These instances are sufficient to show how widely spread and how popular this tradition has become, and we shall come across other instances as we proceed; but we have now to see how far these opinions are justified. I am at present concerned with the early meeting-houses, and not with those which belong to a later period, when anti-Trinitarian opinions had found their way into some congregations and were professed by some ministers. For this purpose I shall confine myself to the chapels which were erected before 1712, for after that date we may find a new spirit entering into the proceedings of some of the ministers and congregations. We are thus brought face to face with the question—Why did these ministers, whom we have seen were all subscribers, who were always strongly attached to doctrines, and sometimes intolerant,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Herbert New, *Unitarian and Free Christian Churches*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Unity Church, Islington* (Leaflet 1881).

found their meeting-houses or, permit them to be founded, with 'open trusts'?

It is generally assumed, as I have shown, that these 'open trusts,' as they are called, are peculiar to the English Presbyterians. It is not easy to find out how many of these Presbyterian meeting-houses there were or are. There does not appear to be one hundred of them in England which are at the present time in the occupation of Unitarian congregations.

But I am informed, on unquestionable authority, that there are, in the occupation of the Congregationalists, also some hundreds of chapels with 'open trusts,' many of which at least date from the same period as the Unitarian ones. The Baptists followed the same practice of not including doctrinal statements in their trust deeds. We must, therefore, assume that if there was any principle involved in this practice it was some general one, and not one peculiar to the Presbyterians.

And this, I think, will enable us at once to dispose of the hypothesis, which is sometimes offered as an explanation of the practice, that there was a desire on the part of some of the Presbyterian congregations to conceal their growing heterodoxy, or a wish to leave the matter open because they were in a state of doctrinal transition, and, therefore, put liberty, as well as religion, before doctrine.

The theory of concealment has been made much of, and the theory of transition still more. The general argument in favour of concealment is that

these congregations were more or less unorthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity or other important doctrines of the Church of England, but as the open avowal of such unorthodoxy was illegal and would have led to the closing of the meeting-houses, they maintained a discreet silence. This argument is to be found in several of the speeches made in the House of Commons during the debates on the Dissenters' Chapels Bill (1844). These theories may, I think, both be dismissed, as we have found ample evidence of the orthodoxy of these ministers and their congregations.

The liberty theory is the only one left, and that is by far the most important. We cannot find a better exposition of it than in the words of the late Mr. W. E. Gladstone:—

‘When I look at these chapel deeds I find, according to the best accounts I can obtain of the terms in which the trusts are commonly declared, that the most general words are used, and if the parties who themselves were willing to subscribe, when they came to found meeting-houses, which of course were intended to be used by posterity as well as themselves, no longer referred to doctrinal tests,<sup>1</sup> but framed their deeds in the largest and most general language, does not that raise a strong pre-

<sup>1</sup> ‘No longer referred to doctrinal tests.’ Mr. Gladstone assumed that this was a departure from previous usage. It could not have been so, as these were the first trusts for tolerated dissenters.

sumption that, though they were themselves believers in particular doctrines, yet they objected on principle to binding their posterity to the maintenance of them for ever ?'<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Gladstone, we see, argued that the founders could and would have expressly forbidden in their trusts any departure from certain doctrines by minister or congregation had they wished to do so. As they did not do so he concluded, therefore, that they intentionally left the matter open in the interests of posterity and religious liberty. This is the line of argument taken by the Unitarian writers I have quoted above. But can we suppose that those Dissenters who were always quarrelling about doctrine were imbued with any such liberal spirit? Or that men who were so strongly opposed, not only to Socinianism and free inquiry, but even to Arminianism, would knowingly and intentionally have provided an open door for the admission of those opinions and principles they could not even tolerate? It is crediting these chapel-builders with a degree of magnanimity almost, if not quite, unparalleled in the history of religion. We have seen who these founders were, we have traced their history for about sixty years, we have seen them always, without exception, insisting upon the necessity of sound doctrine, fundamentals, professions of faith and the like, and yet we are asked to believe that when they built their chapels they were

<sup>1</sup> *Debates on Dissenters' Chapels Bill*, p. 178.

suddenly seized with an indifference as to what should be taught and preached in them in the future, and, on a principle which violated all their other principles, drew up non-theological trust deeds because they did not wish to bind posterity.

Even so good an authority as the Rev. J. J. Tayler overlooked the obvious weakness of this argument. He says:—‘It may be taken, however, as a proof of the wide and deep influence of the Unitarian and kindred controversies that the Presbyterians,<sup>1</sup> with a wise foresight, not wishing to anticipate the issue of a question that was yet under examination, for the most part left the trusts of their meeting-houses quite open, providing simply for the public worship of God and the teaching of His Holy Gospel, or, if any limitations were introduced, admitted such only as were necessary to bring the trust within the benefits of the Toleration Act.’<sup>2</sup>

This argument would have had some weight if the Presbyterians, with their ‘wise foresight,’ had formed a conspicuous exception to the general practice, as it is so often alleged they did; but when we find that they only acted in the same way as the other Dissenters, we are unable to admit the display of any special foresight in their case.

<sup>1</sup> The Presbyterians again.

<sup>2</sup> *Retrospect*, p. 230. ‘The benefits of the Toleration Act’ were confined to those dissenters who subscribed the doctrinal articles of the Church of England. The phrase ‘Christ’s Holy Gospel’ is not found in Chapel deeds, but in the Hewley Charity trust.



Mr. Herbert Skeats, writing on this part of the history of dissent, says that 273 Congregational and 122 Baptist churches now existing, and probably a greater number of Presbyterian, date from this period,<sup>1</sup> and he further says with regard to the trusts: 'The meeting-houses, as they were termed, of the denominations were guarded by trusts of a general character, which neither specified the sect to which they belonged nor the doctrines which were to be preached;<sup>2</sup> but it must not be forgotten that the only dissent which the Toleration Act recognized or allowed was dissent from the forms and ceremonies, it allowed none from the established doctrines of the Church.' The same authority also tells us that the trusts of many of the Presbyterian meeting-houses were so framed that the building could afterwards be used for the Established Church. This was probably intended to enable them to carry their property with them in the event of a coalition with the Church being effected.

All this leads to the conclusion that there was no principle at all embodied or involved in the form of these trusts. The most orthodox felt assured that the doctrinal soundness of the congregation and of future congregations was secured by the law of the

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. T. Timpson, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, says that during the period 1689-1712, the meeting-houses erected in England were, by the Presbyterians and Independents 760, and by the Baptists 247.

<sup>2</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 73.

land, and no special safeguard was necessary to prevent the entrance of heresy. If a minister called himself a Protestant Dissenter or a Presbyterian, that in itself was a declaration of his orthodoxy, and to obtain a licence to preach he must have subscribed to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, and his meeting-house must have been licensed by the bishop of the diocese, the archdeacon, or the justices of the peace. There was no need for them to put doctrinal clauses in their trust deeds, and it did not occur to them to refer to doctrine at all. There is, therefore, no ground for crediting them with 'wise foresight' or with making provision for the growth of religious liberty. They did what was necessary to ensure that the chapels should be preserved for the use and public worship of Protestant Dissenters, and they saw no reason for doing more.

So far this view is based upon general statements, though I think the conclusion cannot with justice be disputed; but it may be interesting to give a particular instance with which I am intimately acquainted, that of the Protestant Dissenting Meeting-house in Barton Street, Gloucester. It was built in 1699, it has an 'open trust,' and for nearly 150 years the congregations and ministers have been anti-Trinitarian.<sup>1</sup> It fulfils all the conditions of the cases under consideration, and may be taken as typical, more especially as the first minister, the

<sup>1</sup> 150 years may be too long, but that is the tradition. See Murch, p. 12.

Rev. James Forbes,<sup>1</sup> lived through the whole of the period and all the changes I have described. He was born in 1630 and died in 1712. We are, I think, in a position to determine if, in declaring the trust of the chapel 'open,' as it is called, he and his friends were influenced by any such motives as they are credited with by Mr. Gladstone, the Rev. John James Tayler, and so many other writers. Mr. Forbes was first appointed a preacher in Gloucester under the Commonwealth in 1654. He held the appointment until he was dismissed at the Restoration in 1660, when he was forbidden to preach in the diocese unless he conformed. This he refused to do, and continued preaching to a congregation or separate church which he had previously gathered about him. He was twice imprisoned, and after his second imprisonment he went to London for a time, returning to Gloucester when the indulgence to Dissenters was granted by the King in 1672, but before long he was again indicted under the Corporation and other Acts, and retired into the country for some years. In 1687 he again returned to the city, gathered his old congregation about him, and in 1699 the meeting-house was built where he carried on his ministry till he died, in 1712. As his epitaph says, he was 'a faithful minister of Christ in this city for about fifty-eight years.' If there is anything in the 'open trust' we should expect the career of such a minister to throw some light upon it, but it does not, and we

<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that Forbes was an Independent.

have exceptional means of knowing all about the opinions, aims, and intentions of Mr. Forbes. Shortly before he died he wrote 'A Letter of Instruction and Advice from an aged Minister to his surviving Friends, to be communicated to them soon after his Decease.'<sup>1</sup>

If certain authors are right in their opinion of the principles which actuated our forefathers in their preference for undoctrinal trusts, we should expect this dying minister to exhort his surviving friends to keep their meeting-house open for all possible developments of truth, to put religion before doctrine, and all the other things which we are told our 'Presbyterian' forefathers said or wished. But we find nothing of the kind. The first part of this deeply interesting letter is retrospective and autobiographical; the second part contains instructions to his congregation with respect to the future. He exhorts them 'to beware of doctrinal errors as of other sins,' 'to keep up the same way of worship,' and 'to keep up the discipline.' So that there shall be no question as to what he regards as doctrinal errors, he says:—

'The first thing I leave with you is this—let the great truths of the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ be very precious to you.

'In matters of faith I am one with the Assembly's Confession and Catechism; I have subscribed the

<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Instruction, being some remains of the Rev. James Forbes, M.A.*

doctrinal articles of the Church of England ; I have never favoured Arminianism, Popery, or Socinianism, nor anything contrary to sound doctrine.'

Yet here is a meeting-house founded by the writer and his friends with an 'open' trust. Can we suppose that this was done with the intention of providing for future theological developments because they attached so little importance to doctrine? It is manifestly impossible to suppose anything of the kind. Mr. Forbes was not only a minister of wide and prolonged experience, but he was a scholar. Nor could he have been ignorant of the controversies which had raged among the Dissenters for so many years during his ministry, for he adds that he was also favourable to the 'Heads of Agreement.'

The meeting-house was founded with the most open trust conceivable, for it was, by the original foundation deed, dated the 7th of January, 1701, to be held, enjoyed, and used by James Forbes and his co-trustees as they or their successors should 'from time to time limit, order, direct, or appoint.'

It was not until 1769, when Joshua Dickenson was the minister, that this power was exercised, when the purpose of the trust was declared that the trustees 'should permit and suffer His Majesty's Protestant subjects dissenting from the Church of England to assemble and meet in the said meeting-house for the purpose of divine worship.' This is now the foundation deed of the chapel.

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Can it be supposed that the general words of the original trust were adopted with any ulterior or far-seeing motive? Is it not clear that the language of the trust was one of the customary forms in use at the time, which were held to be sufficient for the purpose they had in view. We find, then, that these trusts were simply the usual legal form of securing the possession and use of land and buildings for the public worship of congregations of Protestant Dissenters, and that there was no intention in them beyond the legal security thus provided for. We find that a large number, if not all, of the meeting-houses of the three denominations were thus secured and that a minority of this number are now occupied by Unitarian congregations, but that the majority, which are equally 'open' and 'free,' are occupied by Trinitarian congregations.

This latter fact also points to the conclusion that there is no necessary connection between the 'open' trust and free religious views, and we must look in some other direction to find what the influence was which led a minority of the old dissenting congregations to take a different line from that followed by the majority.

The justification of the Unitarian congregations occupying these ancient chapels is not to be found in the theory that the founders were so enlightened and liberal that they intentionally left the door open for their Unitarian successors. This was purely conjectural, not proved by evidence, and carried no

weight with the judges before whom the suits, of which mention has been made, were heard. It was pleaded with much more force, but with no more success, that it would be unreasonable to bind all succeeding congregations for ever to the doctrinal opinions of the first congregation, or that, because it was illegal to preach certain doctrines in these chapels in 1700, therefore it would never be legal to preach them, whatever amendments might be made in the law respecting Protestant Dissent. The law at the time required the minister to subscribe to what are called the doctrinal articles of the Church of England; that is, all of the articles except the 34th, 35th, and 36th, and these words of the 20th article, viz., 'The Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith, and yet—'<sup>1</sup>

In 1779 an Act was passed for the relief of the Dissenters which substituted a general declaration for the Articles, expressed in such terms as Unitarians of the time had no compunction in accepting. The declaration is in the following terms:—'I, A. B., do solemnly declare in the presence of Almighty God that I am a Christian and a Protestant, and, as such, that I believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as commonly received among Protestant Churches, do contain the revealed will of God, and that I do receive the same as the rule of my doctrine and faith.'<sup>2</sup> In 1813 a further Act was

<sup>1</sup> Toleration Act, Clause VIII.

<sup>2</sup> 19 Geo. III., Cap. 44.

passed repealing the exceptive clauses of the Toleration Act, so far as they applied to Unitarians.<sup>1</sup> It was surely only just to claim that Dissenters should enjoy the full benefits of this extension of toleration, and retain possession of the meeting-houses even though in the course of time their opinions had changed from Calvinistic to Unitarian. The Wolverhampton suit was decided adversely to this very reasonable contention, but in order to prevent further litigation and a manifestly unjust application of the law, in 1844 a Bill was promoted, known as the Dissenters' Chapels Bill, which passed both Houses of Parliament by large majorities.<sup>2</sup>

The chief provision of the Act is that 'the religious doctrines or opinions for the preaching or promotion of which the meeting-house may be held, to be collected from twenty-five years' usage, where not expressly stated in the deed of trust.' This limited the enquiry, in case of legal dispute, to the twenty-five years previous to the commencement of a suit, and thus rendered it unnecessary to inquire into the opinions of the founders of the trust. As all the Unitarian congregations at the time occupying the old chapels could plead more than twenty-five years' usage, this Bill practically created a title to possession. The Bill recognised no denominational

<sup>1</sup> 53 Geo. III., Cap. 160.

<sup>2</sup> 7 & 8 Vict., chap. 43. 'A Bill intituled an Act for the regulation of suits relating to meeting-houses and other property held for religious purposes by persons dissenting from the Church of England.'



differences, but protected alike all dissenting meeting-houses which were held upon trusts in which no particular doctrines or opinions or mode of regulating worship were expressly declared. Practically all the early dissenting trusts came within this description.

The opinion that the Presbyterian trusts differed from those of the other denominations appears to have arisen from an oversight on the part of the lawyers. The Solicitor-General, in the *Wolverhampton Case*, compared the early 'Presbyterian' trust deeds with the much later deeds of the Wesleyan Methodists and Congregationalists,<sup>1</sup> instead of comparing them with the same class of documents of the same early period. It would strike anyone that a comparison of the usage of the Methodists with that of the old Protestant Dissenters was, in fact, no comparison at all, their origin and their principles were so different. And as to the Congregationalists, the practice of introducing a schedule of doctrines into their trust deeds was a later innovation, and, therefore, again afforded no just grounds for a comparison. This appears to have been the probable origin of the misunderstanding with regard to the so-called 'open' trusts, and it has come to be forgotten that in the first chapel-building period all the three denominations, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist, followed the same usage.

I think we may conclude that the Unitarians, in

<sup>1</sup> *Wolverhampton Case, Report*, p. 69.

using the chapels which they now occupy in direct and unbroken succession from the original congregations for Unitarian worship and Unitarian teaching, are in no way disloyal to the principle of the 'open trusts,' for there was no principle involved in them; and if the congregation is permitted by the law of the land to be Unitarian, it can offend against no principle if they publicly take the name. I am unable to see upon what grounds an objection can be made. Congregations usually, or at least frequently, give their own name to their place of worship. A chapel used by Baptists is known as a Baptist chapel, a chapel used by Methodists is a Methodist chapel, and a chapel used by Unitarians is a Unitarian chapel, and may, in accordance with custom, be so called as long as the usage continues.

## VII

### THE NON-SUBSCRIBERS.

WE have seen in the preceding chapter that there is no connection between the early dissenting trusts and religious liberty; that is to say, that those who drew up these trusts did not adopt a special form of words as a means of securing doctrinal freedom either for themselves or for those who might occupy the pulpits and chapels after them. Neither, on the other hand, were these trusts the cause of an expansion of liberty. If we take 'non-subscription' as a definite expression of religious liberty, we have seen that it is not coincident or synonymous with these dissenting trusts, for though there are now a number of chapels with these trusts used by congregations who may be called non-subscribing—that is, if non-subscription is understood to mean the refusal to make any belief the condition of membership—there are also a larger number to which the description is not applicable.

It is first necessary to inquire what is meant by 'non-subscription.' Under the Toleration Act, all

dissenting ministers were required to subscribe to the doctrinal part of the articles of the Church of England, and during the first period of tolerated dissent they did so subscribe. There is, therefore, no body of non-subscribers dating from 1662, nor even from 1689.

The term 'non-subscription' is generally used, at least by Unitarians; as implying some distinction amongst Dissenters themselves, and not as between free churches and the Church of England, which is covered by the term nonconformity or dissent. It is further implied that non-subscribing congregations are only a minority of dissenting congregations, and that the majority come under a different category. The inference is that non-subscription is a kind of middle term between Presbyterianism and Unitarianism. Mr. Thom referred to 'our organization' as composed of 'English Presbyterian non-subscribing congregations,' and more recent writers limit the term in the same way. If non-subscription means a neglect to comply with the requirements of the Toleration Act, even as amended in 1779, then probably most Dissenters would now be entitled to call themselves non-subscribers, but this is not what is usually intended. Non-subscription is generally taken to mean a form of latitudinarianism, and the use of it is confined to those bodies or congregations who have ceased to make use of creeds or confessions of faith amongst themselves, who require neither from their ministers or members a written

subscription to articles or a verbal acceptance of doctrinal propositions.

In this sense all dissenters cannot be called non-subscribers, for they generally create some safeguards to prevent their ministers and congregations drifting into heresy, or their property falling into the hands of persons who have departed from the orthodox standard of the denomination; the safeguard may be only some customary form adopted by the 'congregation, or doctrinal statements introduced into the trust deeds of the chapel,<sup>1</sup> or general declarations of Assemblies; though these latter may have no binding force they naturally have a restraining influence, as no congregation is likely to appoint a minister who will not be acceptable to the assembly or union of the denomination.<sup>2</sup> These safeguards have the effect of pre-

<sup>1</sup> In practice this is merely a provision against any decided departure from the faith as commonly received among us, the trustees of the property having it in their power to refuse the use of the building to any ministers whose teaching may be contrary to the doctrines contained in the deed.'—Stoughton, quoted by Bradford, *The Pilgrim in Old England*, p, 198.

<sup>2</sup> Amongst these may be mentioned the Congregational Declaration of Faith and Order, 1833; the resolution affirming the doctrinal basis of the Congregational Union passed at the annual meeting, 1878; the Baptist Union Declaration, 1888; and the Articles of the Faith, Presbyterian Church of England, 1890. To these may be added some of a more general character, such as the Articles of the Evangelical Alliance and the Evangelical Free Church Catechism. See Dr. S. G. Green, *The Christian Creed and the Creeds of Christendom*.

venting open heresy, but they cannot prevent a considerable amount of latitude and departure from doctrinal standards.

Without at present attempting any rigid definition of 'non-subscription' or determining who are and who are not non-subscribers we may recall the circumstances which are said to have given rise to the use of the term among Protestant Dissenters, and we shall then see how it is that it has come to be regarded as synonymous with the holding of Anti-trinitarian opinions.

The terms 'subscribers' and 'non-subscribers' are used to describe the two parties into which the members of the Salters' Hall Conference resolved themselves; and a writer on Presbyterianism in Dublin, etc., states that it was at the Synod of Ulster in 1721 that the names originated in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> At this synod some members signed and some refused to sign the Westminster Confession of Faith. In both instances the circumstances were much the same, the 'non-subscribers' were those who refused to give any attestation of their orthodoxy other than they had already given. In both cases, too, the suspicion that heresy was at the bottom of the refusal was not altogether unfounded; but some may have refused to subscribe upon the ground that they ought not to have been asked; or from the desire to allow liberty to their brethren, that is to say in the general interests of toleration.

<sup>1</sup> Irwin. *Hist. of Presbyterianism*, p. 56.

But besides the Salters' Hall Conference and the Synod of Ulster there was another body which had previously declared in favour of religious liberty; the Baptist Assembly on several occasions between 1691 and 1700 refused to disown or to separate themselves from Matthew Caffyn, one of its members, who was charged with denying the divinity of Christ.

Each of these three cases was followed by somewhat similar results, the spread of anti-Trinitarian opinions. For in each case it was virtually admitted that dissenting pulpits might be occupied by ministers who held unorthodox opinions on the doctrine of the Trinity, and no doubt this is why non-subscription is historically associated with Unitarianism.

Amongst the Baptists the result was the formation by the orthodox party of a New Assembly, and many years later of a New Connection; the original body drifting into Unitarianism.

In Ulster the subscribers and non-subscribers continued to attend the synod together for some years, though the differences between them led to a good deal of friction. In 1726 the Synod resolved to exclude the non-subscribers who set up a Presbytery of their own, which is regarded as Unitarian.

The Salters' Hall Conference being only in the nature of a temporary committee had no power to effect a permanent separation between the opposed parties, though for their immediate purpose they

divided ; and some of the non-subscribing ministers became avowed anti-Trinitarians.

Accepting this as the historical origin of non-subscription amongst dissenters the question arises why did some of them refuse to comply with a demand to which others submitted ? Were they orthodox people who were in favour of liberty, or were they unorthodox people who demanded liberty, and who only refused to 'subscribe' when they had come to disbelieve, or at least to doubt doctrines to which their assent was required ? I do not think that we shall have much hesitation in coming to the conclusion that they were the latter and were almost without exception anti-Trinitarians or Unitarians in the making.<sup>1</sup> This of course applies more particularly to those who first refused to subscribe ; we must keep in mind the distinction between those who demanded liberty because they had departed from some standard and those who were tolerant and willing to allow liberty to those who asked for it ; toleration must not be confounded with non-subscription.

The theory that I have been considering assumes that only one party of dissenters have a heritage

<sup>1</sup> 'It providentially happened that some of the leading Non-conformists were not unanimous as to points of a speculative character, and more particularly as to the doctrine of the Trinity. These divines found liberty of conscience too essential for their own comfort to feel justified in forging shackles for the minds of other men.'—Note by the Editor, *Doddridge's Correspondence*, Vol. I., p. 182.



of freedom and that in consequence of this possession these particular dissenters have become Unitarian. But, at least, for a very long period all dissenters have been allowed equal freedom by law, and yet the majority have remained orthodox, and in order to secure the permanency of their orthodoxy most denominations have created for themselves safeguards in addition to and beyond those required by law. Their freedom has been less dear to them than their orthodoxy and it would appear that only heretics have valued and taken full advantage of their freedom. The Presbyterians of the seventeenth century did not demand liberty but the establishment of Presbyterianism; the Independents demanded the independence of each separate church, but with no wish to encourage heresy; the 'non-subscribers' of the eighteenth century, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist alike, demanded or allowed liberty in the interests of their own theological freedom.

Edmund Calamy was one of the first ministers who did not subscribe to the Articles of the Church of England as required by the Toleration Act, but his case is peculiar; there is no reason to presume that he omitted to do so because he was not orthodox, it is probable that he did so upon the Independent principle that he thought the state had no right to interfere in matters of religious belief. Whatever the reason, he kept the irregularity of which he had been guilty secret. The information is given

by Mr. John Fox, of Plymouth, in his memoirs.<sup>1</sup> Fox himself had conscientious objections to subscribe to the Articles, and he says the chief good Dr. Calamy did him, when they met at Exeter in 1713 was to make him easy on the subject. 'He had been told of my objections and the difficulty I lay under; upon which he took the first opportunity when I was alone with him to tell me, that I need not trouble myself on that head, for "if I could keep myself to myself" (that was his own expression) there was no occasion to subscribe at all. None would ever suspect an omission in such a case as this, or think of examining about it; he said it was his own case, he had never taken them and was never suspected, and he trusted me with this, that I might keep his secret as well as my own.'

As to Mr. Fox's objection there can be no doubt, as he himself tells us that while studying at Exeter, he and Joseph Hallett, Jun., and others 'fell into the Unitarian scheme about the Trinity'—'there were about five or six of us who understood one another in this affair, but we conversed with great caution and secrecy. And from this small beginning sprang the grand quarrel and dispute at Exeter.' We shall find, I think, in this the germ of 'non-subscription.'

We are also told that when the crisis came, Dr. Calamy, as was his wont, kept himself to himself!

Mr. J. T. Rutt says 'it is possible that the

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XVI.

circumstances of Dr. Calamy's having omitted to subscribe, and being thus liable to exposure, may account for the "neutral part" he acted in the great disputes which were carried on among the dissenters in 1718 and the following years.' Dr. Kippis very justly remarks 'Dr. Calamy lost some credit, by not being one of the seventy-three ministers who carried it against sixty-nine, for the Bible in opposition to human formularies.'<sup>1</sup>

The year 1719 must be regarded as the date when 'non-subscription' was first raised to the position of a principle by a section of Protestant Dissenters, and the occasion was the Salters' Hall Conference which arose out of the Exeter controversy. Mr. Fox has already given us a hint of the small beginnings out of which the great quarrel sprang, and explains how he and his fellow-students at Hallett's Academy were led to the study and adoption of Unitarian opinions. Joseph Hallet, Jun., was corresponding with Whiston and introduced books on the Unitarian Controversy to his fellow-students. Fox says he himself was set off by Mr. Boyse's answer to Mr. Emlyn; and James Peirce, who is the principal figure in the episode, declared that anti-Trinitarian opinions were spreading in Exeter before he settled there.

'The common vogue of the people is that there was nothing of this doctrine in the city before my coming into it, that I was the first who brought it

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*. XVI., p. 224.

among them, and abundance of reproaches and untoward wishes have been bestowed upon me for this cause. But there is no truth in this report, Dr. Clarke, Mr. Whiston, and other writers who differ from the common notion, had been read here before my coming; and some few of the people, though they kept it to themselves, had long before, *by only reading their Bibles*, been convinced that it was not agreeable to Scripture.’<sup>1</sup>

The orthodox party becoming aware of this state of things made several efforts to bring about a crisis, but it was not till 1718 that the affair came to a head.

Mr. Fox, after giving some account of the inquisition to which he, as a candidate for the ministry, had been subjected, goes on to say:—

‘In the very next Assembly after this Mr. Peirce’s affair came to a crisis. The orthodox made a public declaration of their faith in the Trinity, agreeable to the Articles and Creeds of the Church of England and to the Assembly’s Catechism, and everybody believed them. Mr. Peirce and his friends hastily set their hands to a paper, in which they declared they were no Arians, and that they believed the Scripture, for which almost everybody laughed at them, and said, they in a manner confessed the Assembly’s charge, and assured the world of it under their own hands.’<sup>2</sup> There is no need to fol-

<sup>1</sup> Murch, *Presbyterian Churches, etc.*, p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> *Monthly Repository*, XVI., p. 199.

low all the details of this controversy. I confine myself to those which bear upon the question of subscription. The point discussed in the Exeter Assembly was whether 'a declaration in words of Scripture be considered orthodox,' and various ministers, Mr. Hallett and Mr. Peirce among them, made declarations of their opinion in different forms. 'Three members of the Assembly refused to make any declaration at all and refused the authority of any body of men to demand their opinion.' Finally it was put on record by the scribe at the declaration of Mr. Langton that 'Tis the general sense of this Assembly that there is but one living and true God, and that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the one True God.'

No formal protest against this record was made by the ministers, but anti-Trinitarianism was not extinguished in Exeter by this resolution of the Assembly.

A meeting of ministers was held when the resolution was come to that they ought to separate themselves from Messrs. Peirce, Hallett, and Withers. Mr. Withers gave way but Peirce and Hallett stood to their opinions.

The advice of the London and other ministers was then sought, which led to the historic conference at Salters' Hall. Here on February 19th, 1719, about one hundred and fifty ministers met to discuss the question, submitted to them from Exeter, 'whether the holding of Arian (*i.e.*, anti-Trinitarian)

opinions by any minister should be a sufficient reason for withdrawing from his fellowship.'

But before they came to the subject of the Conference, Mr. Bradbury proposed that every minister present should subscribe to the first Article of the Church of England on the doctrine of the Trinity and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions in the Westminster Assembly's Catechism on the same subject. This was opposed as the imposition of human creeds, and it was proposed on the other side that declarations should be confined to the words of Scripture. When the proposition was put to the vote the ayes were sixty-nine and the noes seventy-three. 'The Bible carried it by four,' to quote once more Sir Joseph Jekyll's well known epigram.

It is commonly accepted that the non-subscribers were nearly all Presbyterians and the subscribers Congregational,<sup>1</sup> but a careful examination of the names of those who took part does not justify this opinion. The conference was composed of representatives of the three denominations, Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist. Those who signed the advices with the non-subscribers were forty-eight Presbyterians and eight Congregationals, while those who actually signed with the subscribers were twenty-three Presbyterians and twenty-five Congregationals, but the actual subscribers, including those who did not sign the advices were seventy-seven and included thirty-one Presbyterians

<sup>1</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 244.

and thirty-one Congregationals.<sup>1</sup> This at once disposes of the theory that the division was upon denominational lines and that as a body the Presbyterians exhibited a greater disposition to liberality than the Congregationals.

This may be regarded as the beginning of non-subscription in England, and Whiston is reported to have said: 'This I look upon as the first example of a body of Christians declaring for Christian liberty in matters of religion.'<sup>2</sup> But Whiston overlooks the fact that the Baptist Assembly had allowed an equal amount of Christian liberty in the case of one of their own ministers twenty years before; and though the mode of action in the two bodies was not exactly the same, the effect was identical. It may be said that the liberty claimed by the non-subscribers was after all only the independence of the congregation and its minister of the authority of other ministers or assemblies; but they went further than any but the Baptists had gone before in admitting the right of a congregation to appoint a minister of known anti-Trinitarian opinions.

Non-subscription then had no exclusive connection with Presbyterianism and had nothing to do with the form of the chapel trust deeds.

Not only is it a misrepresentation of the case to assert or to imply that the non-subscribers were all Presbyterians and to leave it to be inferred that

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, *Heads of Unitarian History*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XXI., p. 445.

none of them were on the other side ; but the importance of the whole affair has been greatly exaggerated ; if it amounted to anything it was the rejection of the last shreds of Presbyterianism and the acceptance of the independent principle of congregational liberty.

It is generally assumed that the 'non-subscribers' declared against subscription in any form and at any time, while all they did was to decline to subscribe to a particular declaration on a particular occasion.

The Solicitor-General in the Wolverhampton case expressed the popular view in very confident terms. He summed up the situation at Salters' Hall in these words :—

'Such as were for the proposed declaration were anxious their advice should be accompanied, say, with such expressions as these, "We accede to the doctrine of the Trinity as contained in the Articles of the Church of England."' He then gives what he took to be the meaning of the non-subscribers. 'No,' said the majority, 'that we will not do ; we have no difficulty in expressing our own belief ; but we will never agree to the subscription of any articles, not even as to the Holy Trinity. We will not allow of subscription to any articles of belief, or the statement of any creed whatever, to be called for from any person on this or on any other occasion. All that you can require from us is that we receive the Scriptures as the Word of God.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wolverhampton Case, Report*, p. 76.



If the non-subscribers said or meant anything at all like this they must soon have forgotten it, for they wrote :—

‘The advices we send you have the approbation of a great number of our principal gentlemen and citizens, as appears in a paper subscribed by them and laid before a committee of the three denominations. We add our earnest supplication that God would accompany them with his blessing to establish peace and truth among us. And freely declare that we utterly disown the Arian doctrine, and sincerely believe the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and the proper divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.’<sup>1</sup> Not only then did these ministers do the very thing they are credited with not doing, only in a slightly different form, but curiously enough this very passage was quoted by the Solicitor-General himself immediately after he had made the statement quoted above.

These non-subscribers, too, it must be remembered had subscribed to the Articles of the Church of England as the law required, and instead of asserting that they would ‘never agree to the subscription to any articles or the statement of any creed whatever,’ etc., professed their readiness to do it as often as might be required by law, all they objected to was an unnecessary multiplication of occasions.

<sup>1</sup> *Wolverhampton Case, Report*, p. 77. Quoted from *An Authentic Account of several things done and agreed upon by the Dissenting Ministers lately assembled at Salters' Hall*.

'Our brethren say that though we for our parts are required by the legislature to subscribe but once, yet those of the Established Church must repeat it on various occasions. But because the Established Church is obliged to do it so often, does it become dissenters from the Establishment to invite the same restraint? Don't we always reckon it a privilege, as well as a reason of our dissent, that we are freer from subscription than they? And though the same reasons will always oblige in the same circumstances, *i.e.*, if the Government see fit to make it necessary, yet it does not follow that we are therefore obliged to do the same things without the same necessity, or to set up an authority over one another.'<sup>1</sup>

I think it must be admitted that non-subscription did not originate in any vague liberalism or an abstract love of freedom, but with men who desired more freedom because they had begun to doubt the doctrine of the Trinity, and consequently it contributed to the advance of anti-Trinitarian opinions. After the Salters' Hall Conference Unitarianism spread with unexampled rapidity,<sup>2</sup> and in the very next year Dr. James Foster, a Baptist, published an essay to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a fundamental of Christianity.

All the Dissenters had the same advantages and

<sup>1</sup> *Defence of the Reasons for not Subscribing, etc.*, 1719. Quoted in Appendix to *Wolverhampton Case, Report*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Skeats, *Hist. of Free Churches*, p. 247.

opportunities, yet the minority became Unitarian and the majority remained orthodox. What the non-subscribers defended at Salters' Hall was the right of private judgment, and though this right is admitted by all Dissenters, in the majority of cases it is practically refused, as it is generally required that private interpretation of Scripture must be in accordance with some declaration or confession which has received general approval.

Non-subscription is a vague expression and capable of several interpretations, and naturally it is not in common use. It may only mean a refusal to sign a particular declaration on a particular occasion, as at Salters' Hall, or it may be extended to mean an absolute refusal to make any belief the condition of religious association. A term that is capable of being used with so much latitude cannot be generally serviceable, as it must always stand in need of definition.

The principle which has led to our wide departure from orthodoxy is a more definite one, and is sometimes described as 'free inquiry.'<sup>1</sup> But even

<sup>1</sup> 'At the same time recognises the essential worth of that principle of free inquiry to which we are indebted for our own form of Christianity.'—From a Resolution read by Rev. James Martineau at a meeting of Unitarians at Essex Street Chapel, 1838. In the speech with which Mr. (Dr.) Martineau prefaced his resolution, he said: 'I mean the continued exercise in matters of religion of perfectly free inquiry, unproved by others' fears, and unrestricted by any authority foreign to the inquirer's mind.'—Reprinted in *Unitarianism Confuted*, pp. 124-130.

this principle of free inquiry does not go to the root of the matter. In these days all have the right of exercising free inquiry, but the mere right produces no results. Those who are satisfied with orthodox or hereditary modes of faith and worship have no desire to exercise their privilege, indeed in many cases it is esteemed sinful to doubt or question the doctrines held by the church or denomination to which people belong, and while they boast of their right of private judgment, or free inquiry, it is a right they never exercise except within certain prescribed limits. It follows, then, that only those who have begun to doubt or question accepted doctrines will be found in the ranks of free inquirers, and therefore Dr. Martineau's principle of 'free inquiry' is not the primary cause of our form of Christianity. It is a secondary one. The primary cause is doubt or disbelief in the common doctrines, or, to put it affirmatively, the love of truth, and free inquiry led the doubters in orthodox churches to those conclusions which developed into Unitarianism. The love of truth is the source of religious progress, and freedom is a condition of this progress. In orthodox churches progress is arrested by restraints either imposed by authority or adopted voluntarily. It is the determination to pursue truth, and not to any vague freedom, that we are indebted for our form of Christianity; our predecessors demanded freedom in order that they might find truth, and the attainment of truth has increased our appreciation of freedom.

Freedom from State control in religion, which is the principle of the Evangelical Free Churches, is not synonymous with religious freedom in this broader sense; it may be coincident with it or it may not be, as the freedom granted by the State may be restricted by denominational usage. Free inquiry is not concerned with Church government, but with the individual exercise of spiritual freedom.<sup>1</sup> Though free inquiry is not controlled by the State, or by any other ecclesiastical authority, it must be guided by reverence and knowledge; irreverent and ignorant thinking is not the same thing as spiritual freedom, and free religion is religion which is free from *every* form of ecclesiastical restraint. It is in this sense that Unitarians claim to be free; others may claim to exercise the same freedom, but frequently in doing so it is in spite of pledges given to the contrary. Unitarians are unpledged, and may thus claim to be free in the widest sense of the word, but spiritual freedom is essentially an undenominational principle, and we owe the enjoyment of it to men like Milton, Vane, Chillingworth, Locke and Priestley, more than to any others.

<sup>1</sup> 'Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue according to my conscience, above all liberties.'—Milton, *Areopagitica*.

See also Channing's splendid sermon on 'Spiritual Freedom.'

## VIII.

### THE 'CHRISTIANS ONLY.'

'**W**E are Christians, and only Christians.' This is a declaration which is sometimes held up for our admiration and imitation as being so much more catholic than the affirmation 'We are Unitarian Christians.' I do not think it will be difficult to show that they mean the same thing. The sentence occurs in the sermon delivered by Dr. John Taylor at the opening of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, on the 12th of May, 1756, and may be taken as an indication of the theological position of many liberal dissenting ministers and congregations during what we may call the middle period; that is, from the Salters' Hall Conference until the beginning of the second Unitarian Movement with Lindsey and Priestley.<sup>1</sup> The liberals as we may call them, Presbyterians as they are sometimes, but incorrectly, called, had given up the doctrines of the Church of

<sup>1</sup> The Unitarian controversy in the seventeenth century was confined to literature, and had no connection with dissenting congregations.

England and the Assembly's Catechism, but had adopted no very definite theological position and no new designation, they were content to be known as Protestant Dissenters.<sup>1</sup> The sermons of the ministers were characterised by an absence of doctrinal discussion, and were, perhaps, moral and practical rather than devotional and spiritual. Dr. John Taylor, however, was distinguished for a more open and explicit dealing with controverted religious topics than many of his brethren.

We have to enquire what was the theological position of these ministers who are described as 'only Christians'?

In the Appendix (No. 14) to the Debates on the Dissenters' Chapels Bill there are given extracts from petitions presented by seventy-six congregations in favour of the Bill. In the majority of them it is stated that the congregations and ministers had been anti-Trinitarian from about the middle of the eighteenth century. The 'Christians only' represent this transitional stage between orthodoxy and definite Unitarianism; it would perhaps be incorrect to call them Unitarians as they did not call themselves so. James Peirce, for instance, declined any name save Christian, though there can be no doubt about his anti-Trinitarianism. In the movement away from orthodoxy, the congregations passed through three

<sup>1</sup> The title of Dr. John Taylor's sermon was, 'The Glory of any House erected for Religious Worship, and the True Principles, civil and social, of Protestant Dissenters.'

stages which may be described as Non-Trinitarian, Anti-Trinitarian and Unitarian. The 'Christians only' were Non-Trinitarians who, at least, held with James Foster that the Trinitarian doctrine was not a fundamental of Christianity; though they did not make the denial of the doctrine a prominent part of their teaching,<sup>1</sup> they frequently expressed opinions little differing from those of the Unitarians who followed them. It would not be easy to collect evidence relating to the opinions of all the liberal ministers and congregations during a period of fifty years which came to an end more than one hundred years ago, when they openly became Unitarian;<sup>2</sup> but we may obtain some insight into what was going on from the case of Gloucester again. The second minister, Joseph Denham, was ordained in 1713, and soon after his ordination a division in the congregation took place, and the seceders formed another church.<sup>3</sup> Murch says, 'The cause of the secession does not appear. Mr. Denham was probably more liberal than the seceders wished him to be.'<sup>4</sup> This opinion is justified by the subsequent history of the two congregations, the original congregation proceeding rapidly in the direction of Unitarianism, the second congregation remaining Calvinists almost down to the present time. In

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps because it was illegal to do so.

<sup>2</sup> Considerable knowledge of their opinions, however, may be gained from Turner's *Lives*.

<sup>3</sup> Now the Southgate Congregational Church.

<sup>4</sup> Murch, p. 12.



his ordination address Denham only makes one admission in accordance with Moderate Calvinism, and the whole tone of the proceedings shows a declining interest in the old doctrines. Denham left Gloucester for London about 1722, and several sermons preached by him subsequently are still in print. One preached by him in Gravel Lane on January 2nd, 1737-8, was published at the request of the managers of the Charity School there, and is remarkable for the entire absence of doctrine, with the exception of a recognition of the Arian doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. His opening sentence anticipates Channing's view of Christianity by more than a hundred years. Denham said,—‘The great design of Christianity is to form in our hearts a superlative love of God and an unfeigned love of men. These two precepts are a comprehensive summary of practical religion, and what all the revelations of God to mankind are intended to explain and enforce as absolutely necessary to our being accepted and approved by him.’ As the sermon containing these sentiments was published by request, and another by the same preacher delivered at Salters' Hall in 1744, in which he says, ‘The design of Christianity is to make men good and keep them so,’ reached a second edition, we may infer that this kind of un-doctrinal and ethical preaching had already become popular among the liberal dissenters.

To return to Gloucester, though the division in

the congregation about 1715 may not have been entirely upon doctrinal grounds, it is evident that the majority were in favour of liberal views. In 1740 the minister was Dr. Hodge, who is said to have been an Arian, and towards the end of the century some of the earliest and warmest sympathisers with Dr. Priestley were to be found in Gloucester.

The history of many other congregations was much the same, and we may accept it as beyond question that they were unorthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity by the middle of the century.

For a full illustration of the real significance of the meaning attaching to the phrase 'only Christians,' we can find none better than that afforded by the theological position of Dr. John Taylor himself. The passage in the Norwich sermon in which the words occur is worth reproducing :—

'We are Christians, and only Christians, a name which, in its original and true meaning, includes all that is virtuous and amiable, just and good, noble and divine, excellent and heavenly. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Calvinists, Arminians, Arians, Trinitarians, and others are names of religious distinctions. But, however we may commonly be ranked under any of these divisions, we reject them all.<sup>1</sup> We disown all connection, except that of love and goodwill, with any sect or party whatsoever; and we consider all our fellow Protestants, of every denomination, in the

<sup>1</sup> Taylor rejected 'Presbyterian,' but not 'Unitarian.'

same light, only as Christians, and cordially embrace them all in affection and charity as such.' . . .

'This edifice is founded upon no party principles or tenets, but is built on purpose and with this very design, to keep ourselves clear from them all; to discharge ourselves from all prejudices and fetters in which any of them may be held, so that we may exercise the public duties of religion upon the most catholic and charitable foundation,' etc.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. John Taylor is justly regarded as an anti-Trinitarian, and is included in Turner's *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*. When Taylor went to Norwich in 1733 he read and discussed Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* with his congregation, and from that time the opinions of the congregation were avowed and known to be in unison with those of their pastor, and this is emphasised by the fact that a few members, to whom his opinions were unacceptable, withdrew.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. J. J. Tayler says: 'The other side of the orthodox system, in its two principal doctrines of original sin and vicarious satisfaction, were attacked with sound biblical learning and a most powerful intellect by Dr. John Taylor.'<sup>3</sup>

It may be well to point out here how essential these doctrines are to the Trinitarian scheme; the doctrine of the Trinity does not stand alone, and so by the liberal Christians of the last century it was

<sup>1</sup> Turner, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians*, Vol. I., pp. 329-30.

<sup>2</sup> Turner, I., p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, *Retrospect*, p. 286.

properly spoken of as a 'scheme.' Original sin, eternal punishment, and vicarious satisfaction are essential parts of it; without these Trinitarianism, or rather the doctrine of the Trinity, is a mere matter of metaphysical speculation, but these doctrines taken together constitute a religion—that is, Trinitarian Christianity. They carry with them a conception of God and of the relations of God to man, of salvation and the means of salvation radically different from that of any form of Unitarian Christianity, and therefore to abandon these doctrines, or any one of them, is to disintegrate the Trinitarian scheme; this has always been recognised by systematic theologians, though it is often overlooked by superficial writers and loose thinkers. In these days there are 'Trinitarians' who have given up the doctrines of eternal punishment, original sin, and vicarious satisfaction; they are therefore Trinitarians in name only. For the same reason, Unitarians who have given up the doctrine of the Trinity find little interest in discussing these other doctrines, for they necessarily follow the fate of the first. *Cur Deus Homo* has no meaning to a Unitarian.<sup>1</sup>

That Dr. John Taylor attacked these great Evangelical doctrines is sufficient proof in itself that

<sup>1</sup> 'If the proper humanity of Christ be once established, the commonly received doctrine of the atonement falls to the ground.' —Belsham, *Discourse on the Progress of Intellectual, Moral, and Religious Improvement*, p. 137.

he had crossed the Rubicon. When, therefore, we find that the 'only Christians,' even when not openly anti-Trinitarian, had given up these other doctrines which form an essential part of Trinitarianism, we do them no injustice in placing them on the Unitarian side of the line.

And this is in accordance with the opinion that was held of them by their contemporaries. 'From Doddridge's correspondence we learn that Taylor's writings, from their supposed heretical tendencies, were viewed with suspicion and alarm by many Dissenters.'<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley went further than suspect Taylor. He openly charged him with heresy of the worst kind. In a letter dated 3rd July, 1759, he said: 'Take away the scriptural doctrine of redemption and justification, and that of the new birth, the beginning of sanctification, or which amounts to the same thing, explain them as you do, suitably to your doctrine of original sin, and what is Christianity better than heathenism? Wherein (save in rectifying some of our notions) has the religion of St. Paul any pre-eminence over that of Socrates or Epictetus?'<sup>2</sup>

We may well ask after this wherein did Dr. John Taylor differ from a Unitarian Christian? No doubt Taylor was perfectly sincere in hoping that the Catholic principle he advocated, which, after all, is only acceptable to those who have given up

<sup>1</sup> Tayler, *Retrospect*, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287, note.

orthodox opinions, would disarm opposition, and it appears to be sincerely believed that the same undenominational profession would disarm opposition now; but it did not do so and it will not do so. Heresy is unpalatable to the orthodox by whatever name it is called, or if it is called by none. We see how acutely Wesley detected and exposed it in Taylor's case, and though he used strong expressions, he was courteous and refrained from personal abuse. But it was not so with all Taylor's critics. His great-grandson, in his memoir of his own father, gives some account of the insults which were heaped upon his pious and learned ancestor, some of them, significantly enough, on account of his 'only Christian' sermon. The following is given as a 'fair specimen' from a pamphlet pretending to be the production of a Quaker. 'A Friendly Epistle to Neighbour John Taylor, of the City of Norwich, occasioned by his Sermon preached at the Opening of the New Chapel.' 'Be honest and open and free, my friend,' says the writer; 'but for shame call not thyself Christian. Thou and those in thy way have the impudence of ten thousand harlots, while with brows of brass ye hold the Bible in your hands, tell the world *that* contains your religion, and at the same time deny all its peculiar and distinguishing doctrines. This! this! is that which fills the land with Atheism—this is the cursed root

<sup>1</sup> By 'M. Adamson,' who is supposed to have been a Baptist minister, Grantham Killingworth.

of that infidelity now prevailing in the world—this is the masterpiece of the old serpent's subtlety.'<sup>1</sup>

The vilest attack upon this excellent man appeared shortly after his death in the form of a pamphlet, entitled *The Arians' and Socinians' Monitor, being the Vision that a young Socinian Teacher lately had, in which he saw, in the most exquisite Torment, his Tutor, and had from his own mouth the fearful Relation of what befel him after Death.*

This young teacher, after having informed his readers that he had been admitted to a sight of the horrors of hell, then proceeds to depict the situation in which he there beheld his former tutor, Dr. Taylor:—

'In the midst of all I beheld one person who stood for some time on the sulphurous billows, surrounded by an enraged company, who with red-hot irons kept pushing against him. Deep despair and wild distraction lowered on his condemned countenance. He raved! he foamed! he wrestled! and then sunk down in final despair, while the direful floods of divine vengeance rolled upon him.'<sup>2</sup>

I only quote this abominable production to show how the man who proclaimed himself to be only a Christian was regarded by the extreme orthodox Dissenters of his time; and scandalous as we shall presently see were the attacks afterwards made upon the Unitarians, I do not think there ever appeared,

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XXI., p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

in the worst days of the Trinitarian controversy, anything to equal this.

We may also learn from this that names have nothing to do with the aversion with which heterodoxy is viewed, and that undoctrinal Christianity will be repelled by the orthodox whether it is called Unitarianism or anything else. Unitarians are advised that they would diminish opposition if they gave up an objectionable name; I doubt it as long as they refuse to accept the opinions of the majority. Dr. John Taylor defined, or stated his position, by refusing to be called by any denominational name then in use, but his appeal to charity and catholicity was itself only regarded as a sign of heresy, if not of atheism.

In Taylor's time the line had not been drawn between Trinitarian and Unitarian congregations; it has since been drawn, and we can now only define our position by calling ourselves Unitarian. If we were to follow the advice given, and call ourselves 'only Christians,' the very natural and pertinent question would be put—What kind of Christian, Trinitarian or Unitarian? To say neither the one nor the other would be absurd, and would only meet with the same kind of reception that James Peirce met with, when his refusal to avow himself was at once laughed at and taken as an admission of the truth of the charge made against him. No conscientious Trinitarian would decline to admit his belief in the doctrine; a refusal would naturally be



taken as evidence of a desire to conceal Unitarian opinions. There are some, no doubt, in Evangelical churches who are in truth only concealed or Crypto-Unitarians; people who in reality hold Unitarian opinions, but who do not know them to be such, or will not own to them. They are not following Dr. Taylor's example, for he did not conceal his opinions, nor was he afraid of accepting the consequences of them. In Queen Anne's time there were some Dissenters who occasionally conformed and went to church in order to avoid the disabilities under which strict Nonconformists laboured; they were accused, and not altogether without reason, of being time-servers. It is possible that there is a class to-day who, for want of a better name, might be called 'Occasional Trinitarians'; people who have given up all the peculiar and distinctive doctrines of the Trinitarian scheme, but who are not willing to accept the disadvantages which an open avowal of Unitarian opinions might inflict upon them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> They are like the Baxterians. They have given up the doctrines of the true Trinitarians, but they are terribly afraid of being called or thought Unitarians.—See Note, p. 76 *ante*.

## IX.

### THE UNITARIANS.

WE have arrived at the point where one class of dissenters who for many years had been departing further and further from the orthodoxy, *i.e.*, the Calvinism, of the previous century are henceforth to be known under the definite style and title of Unitarian. The congregations, ministers, chapels and societies are to bear that name ; a name which has probably caused more uneasiness than any other alike to those who are called by it and those who are opposed to them. Some who are called by it dislike it and even repudiate it while they confess to holding the religious opinions it indicates. It is asserted to be only a theological distinction carrying with it a sectarian consequence. It will be my endeavour to show that it is a religious distinction rather than a doctrinal one and cannot, in any offensive sense, be said to be sectarian. If by sectarian is only meant something sectional, something which is characteristic of a part of a community or a nation, then it is sectarian, but only in the

sense that every denominational name is sectarian. It is not so sectarian as Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist or Methodist. As these represent divisions amongst dissenters who all agree upon fundamentals, while Unitarians, though not so numerous, represent a separation on principle from all the others.

In the fourth quarter of the last century the name Unitarian was adopted by some of the dissenters who had hitherto been unclassified, but there was nothing denominational about it—Unitarians had been Churchmen like Biddle, Firmin, Clarke and Lindsey; Baptists like Caffyn and Foster; Independents like Manning, Caleb Fleming and Lardner, as well as 'Presbyterians' like Peirce and Taylor.

The change from indefinite liberalism or anti-Trinitarianism to definite Unitarianism was a perfectly natural change which was bound to come. People cannot remain indefinite for ever, a time must come when a choice must be made; if it does not spring from within it is compelled from without. No doubt the Evangelical movement had something to do with the adoption of the Unitarian name by congregations who wished to be distinguished from the Evangelicals. Such a development as this change marked may mean a violent rupture with the past or it may be simply an advance upon existing conditions; in the case of the Unitarians it was the latter. The difference in a congregation before and after it came to be called Unitarian was unnoticeable

except in an accession of what might be called self-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> These dissenters had been beating about the bush for a long time when Lindsey and Priestley started the hare.

I think it correct to describe the progress of the theological movement as one from orthodoxy to non-Trinitarianism, from that to Anti-Trinitarianism, and then to Unitarianism. The intermediate stages are more often described as Arianism and Socinianism, but these were only passing forms of Anti-Trinitarianism. Broadly put, the development was from Calvinism to Arminianism, and from Arminianism to Unitarianism. Arianism and Socinianism were only results of attempts to resolve difficulties which first arose in the minds of those who realised the error of Trinitarianism. The passage from Arminianism to Unitarianism is not difficult. Tayler says, 'The Arminian and Socinian systems were not identical but grew out of a common tendency of mind. Both indicated a determination to quit the ground of authority or of mere appeal to enthusiastic feeling and to bring the doctrines of religion to the test of conscience and the understanding.'<sup>2</sup> Calvinists classed Arminians and Socinians together as heretics, and in 1699 the Bishop of Worcester used the term Socinian as synonymous with Arminian.<sup>3</sup>

At first, that is from about 1720, some ministers were Non-Trinitarians, they were contented to drop

<sup>1</sup> The members of the congregation were the same people.

<sup>2</sup> Tayler, *Retrospect*, p. 202. <sup>3</sup> Calamy, *Abridgment*, p. 564.

the Doctrine of the Trinity or ceased to regard it as a fundamental Christian doctrine ; but they were soon compelled by circumstances as well as by the progressive tendency of the human mind, to oppose the doctrine and other related ones ;<sup>1</sup> and then, we may say, they were on the look out for a positive principle, Dr. John Taylor thought he had found it when he proclaimed himself only a Christian ; but that was wanting in distinctiveness as we have seen. The Anti-Trinitarians were distinguished by their opposition to certain doctrines ; relying upon the scripture they asserted that the Trinitarian scheme was unscriptural ; but on the more positive side they were more or less at sea and had no uniting principle.

The Unitarians arrived at and declared a positive principle of worship and belief, it was simply this,—‘That worship must be offered to the Father only as God.’ Whatever differences of opinion there may have been and may be still amongst Unitarians this is the great religious principle which unites them ; and this at once differentiates them from all classes of Trinitarians who worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The primary difference between Trinitarians and Unitarians is in their worship.

At the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union in 1878, when the Leicester Conference was discussed and the object of it, the association of

<sup>1</sup> At first the doctrine appeared unnecessary, then it was conceived to be untrue.

Evangelicals and Unitarians, condemned by a large majority, Dr. Enoch Mellor said,—‘It was not a question of individual freedom, but of association and fellowship; and asked how they could have fellowship with each other when they did not worship the same Being and preach the same Gospel.’<sup>1</sup> The difference in the prayers and hymns of Trinitarian and Unitarian Christians is a sufficient proof of the accuracy of this statement.

The language of Lindsey in his *Apology* is always in harmony with this definition of ‘Unitarian’ as referring to the object of worship and not to any doctrinal scheme. He speaks of his willingness to bear testimony to ‘the honour and worship of the One God and Father of all’<sup>2</sup> and ‘That God is One; and consequently the object of worship *one only* is of foremost importance to religion.’<sup>3</sup>

Put into terms of thought this principle is amplified by Yates: ‘Unitarians mean that the universe is subject to one simple and individual mind, one all-wise Designer, who is uncreated, unchangeable, everlasting, without the aid of any Counsellor, assistant, or associated God, for the production of every effect which is exhibited throughout endless time and infinite space.’<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 652. For full report of this discussion and Dr. Mellor’s speech, see special numbers of *Christian World*, May 8th and 15th, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsey’s *Apology*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. See also Channing’s *Sermon on Christian Worship*.

<sup>4</sup> Yates, *Vindication*, p. 51 (2nd Edition).

Dr. Lant Carpenter's definition was : 'The absolute Unity, the unrivalled Supremacy, the exclusive worship and the free essential mercy of God even the Father.'<sup>1</sup>

It would not be easy for any Unitarian Christian to improve upon these definitions. The principle that 'Worship must be paid to the Father only as God' is from the Unitarian point of view beyond criticism. I think, therefore, that seeing that this is what Unitarian means, it is incorrect to describe it as merely doctrinal, critical, negative, speculative, dogmatic, or sectarian. These terms might be applicable to some opinions, held or expressed by some individual Unitarians or groups of Unitarians, but they cannot apply to the principle of Unitarian Christianity. Under this principle there is vast room for difference of opinion, and no opinion, except such as clashes with this principle, is barred by Unitarianism. It is a religious principle and not a mere doctrinal opinion ; it is not dogmatic for it allows unlimited freedom to the human mind ; it puts no barrier in the way of any investigation conducted by intellectual methods ; it does not impede the exercise of devotion, or of the affections or aspirations, or interfere with the performance of duty or the practice of benevolence. The conception of the One God and Father may vary according to the religious or mental culture of the worshipper, but the principle remains the same.

<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, *An Examination of the Charges, etc.*, p. 25.

Unitarian, then, is a religious and not only a theological distinction, and if the thing is justifiable there can be no reason for objecting to the name which indicates the existence of the thing. A Unitarian congregation is a congregation of Christians who worship the Father only, a Unitarian chapel is a chapel in which the Father only is worshipped, a Unitarian society is a society of Unitarians. Is there any other name that would so clearly, so inoffensively and with so little ambiguity serve the same purpose?

This is not what 'Unitarian' has come to mean, or what it may be made to mean, it is what it has meant for more than a hundred years, in fact, ever since there have been any Unitarian congregations. This is what it meant to Lindsey and Priestley and Belsham and Yates and Carpenter and Channing, this is what it meant to the members of the original Unitarian society, and this is what it means to us.

It is a frequent complaint made against Unitarians that they attach too much importance to doctrine, and it has been said that they put doctrine before religion. What does this mean? We understand by Religion—Worship, duty and benevolence—and these are to come before doctrine. How can they be separated? The English of 'doctrine' is teaching, and teaching is always associated with religion; it is difficult to see how people can be religious if they are not taught. To worship with the understanding it is necessary to



have a right understanding of the object of worship and this implies theological teaching; and for the proper performance of duty it is necessary to have ethical teaching, so that doctrine is inseparable from religion. The Bible is full of doctrine and it is this which gives it its value.

Again, if by doctrine be meant a proper conception of the object of worship, then it would not be too much to say that doctrine must come before religion; it is unreasonable to say we ought to worship without being taught whom we ought to worship. From our present point of view the question is whether we should worship the Father or the Triune Deity, and this question must be settled before our religion begins; and as it is decided one way or the other our worship will be determined and our religion take form. It may lead even to differing conceptions of duty and the true nature of benevolence. It has been said that Unitarians put doctrinal truth on their banner before salvation. Why not? for until you have decided what salvation is and how it is to be attained you cannot put it on your banner. The Calvinist means one thing by 'salvation,' the Unitarian Christian means another. Salvation itself is a subject of doctrine.

But if by doctrine be meant the insistence upon certain theological propositions apart from their religious value, then we should agree that religion must come before doctrine; but this would be better expressed by saying that controversy is not so im-

portant as devotion and the proper performance of our duties ; though at times controversy, or the exposure of error, may be itself a paramount duty.

It is incorrect, then, to speak of the Unitarianism of Priestley, the Unitarianism of Channing, and so on. Their Unitarianism was the same ; their opinions on many important matters differed widely, but their principle was the same. One Unitarian may be a mystic ; another a controversialist, another a philanthropist, but they are all Unitarians. One Unitarian may accept the authority of the Bible, another may question it, one may believe in miracles, another reject them, but these are not essential parts of Unitarian Christianity, but worship, duty, and benevolence are, and these all Unitarians cultivate.

Unitarianism, or more properly, Unitarian Christianity is more than a matter of opinion about which we may be indifferent. It may be a matter of secondary importance whether miracles happen or not, or whether the Bible is infallible, or whether we believe Jesus was the Messiah, but it is of primary importance that our worship be rightly directed.

The early Unitarians based their certainty upon the teaching of the Bible ; if we confine ourselves less to the Bible than they did we are none the less convinced that the One God and Father is the sole proper object of worship ; and we are equally convinced that this is the teaching of Scripture. To recede from this, in the name of liberty, would not be to advance, but to go back to superstitions which

our fathers discarded. Anyone is free to do this, but if he does let him not presume that he is therefore freer than those Unitarians who adhere to their belief. We make this our starting point, this is a height which has been achieved after years of toil and sacrifice. We cannot abandon it for the sake of the friendship of other denominations, or in obedience to mere objections to a name, or in deference to the susceptibilities of people whom it offends.

It cannot fairly be objected to the name we bear that it is incorrect, or inappropriate, or un-historical. One reason, I fear, for objections to the name, whether expressed or not, is that it is unpopular; and one reason why it is unpopular will easily be understood when we recall the Trinitarian controversy; so much obloquy has at one time and another been heaped upon it, unjustly as all intelligent people now confess, that many shrink from taking a name which has so often been the subject of insult. The old Unitarians did not shrink either from the name or from its consequences, Channing, indeed, confessed that he took it all the more cheerfully, because of the efforts to get up a popular cry about it.

The name is a distinction in more senses than one. It not only distinguishes us from Trinitarian Christians; but it is a declaration that we dissociate ourselves from all the errors and corruptions of Christendom. Unitarian Christians repudiate all

complicity in the crimes, all share in the intolerance, all responsibility for the failure of other forms of Christianity. We take our stand upon the principle that worship must be paid to the Father alone as God, and that the Christian religion consists in the spirit of Christ; and not in the acceptance of doctrines or the participation in sacraments. In calling ourselves Unitarian Christians we proclaim this to the world. We assert the spirituality, the purity, the morality of our faith. If we fail, either personally or collectively, the failure is our own and not that of our principles.

The best thing said upon the objection to the name was perhaps some words of the Rev. John James Tayler in a letter which he wrote to the Rev. J. H. Thom in 1859: 'I think we make too much pother about a name. . . . It will either die away and be succeeded, through the natural working of events, by another and more appropriate one, or the old name will itself expand into a broader and nobler significance. All names are to a certain extent inappropriate.<sup>1</sup> But usage and long possession partially rectify the evil. Any deliberate attempt to suppress a name in wide circulation, and artificially to substitute another, which must be coined for the occasion, would do more harm

<sup>1</sup> Dr. John Clifford says of the name 'Baptist': 'Is it not strange that the popular label of one of the most anti-ritualistic and spiritual of societies should fix attention on a method and not on a conviction, on a form and not on an idea.'—*Religious Systems of the World*, p. 563.

than good and expose us to more suspicion and ridicule than ever.'<sup>1</sup>

There is one other interesting question which we may glance at before proceeding to notice some of the leaders of English Unitarianism, and that is, Where did it come from ?

It is usual to seek its origin in recondite and foreign sources, but this appears to me to be unnecessary. It is indigenous and has a character of its own. English Unitarians were for a time called Socinians, not because they ever professed to be followers of Socinus, but because there was some resemblance between their opinions and those of the famous Italian.

There is no need to go so far. English Unitarianism originated in the English practice of reading the Bible and making it the sole standard of religious truth. James Peirce said that some of the people at Exeter had been convinced that the common notion of the Trinity was not agreeable to Scripture 'by only reading their Bibles,' and the biographer of Professor Maurice admitted that those congregations in the last century which decided to make, not the creed, but the Scripture the basis of their teaching had all lapsed into Unitarianism.\* John Biddle reached his conclusions through his own study of the Scriptures alone. Dr. Lardner declared that he was not only unacquainted with

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Tayler, *Letters*, Vol. II., pp. 143-4.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rev. J. J. Lias, *The Nicene Creed*, p. 12.

Crellius *De Uno Deo Patre* but that he had not even looked into the collection of Unitarian tracts and had formed his sentiments upon the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> And Priestley confessed that he formed the most distinguishing of his opinions in religion in the same way.<sup>2</sup> Such instances might be multiplied but these are sufficient to show how English Unitarianism originated ; that those who were thus led to give up the doctrine of the Trinity on scriptural grounds should afterwards make themselves acquainted with the writings of foreign Unitarians was only natural, but they did not, in the first instance, derive their opinions from foreigners.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Toulmin, *Life of Biddle*, p. 15.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> An exception may be made in the case of Paul Best, but he does not appear to have exerted any permanent influence on English Unitarianism.

## X.

### JOHN BIDDLE.

**I** MUST here for the first time make a break in the continuity of this story and go back more than a hundred years from the period at which we have arrived; for though the impulse given to English Unitarianism by John Biddle was in a measure arrested by the events which followed his death in 1662 it was not abortive, and when English Unitarianism became an important and permanent movement amongst the Dissenters, attention was turned to the life and work of the man who not improperly has been called its father.<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. J. J. Tayler refers to isolated instances of Socinianism or Unitarianism in England in the seventeenth century, and before introducing Biddle's name says that the Socinian doctrine was widely spread throughout the kingdom, and he supports the assertion by a statement made by Dr. John Owen in 1655. After referring to other evidence of the prevalence of Unitarian opinion, Tayler says :

<sup>1</sup> Toulmin, p. i.

'These facts supply unquestionable proof of the extensive diffusion of Unitarian opinion; but as yet it had received no body or prominence. It was rather a latent element of thought silently circulated in books than an open profession of faith and worship; for no individual of eminent learning and high character had arisen to preach it boldly in opposition to the general persuasion of the Christian world.' 'Such a one,' he continues, 'at length appeared in the person of John Biddle.'<sup>1</sup>

From the way Tayler introduces Biddle it might be imagined that he did not come upon the scene until after the condition of things described by Owen in 1655, but the fact is that the extensive diffusion of Unitarian opinion at that time was due to Biddle more than to anyone else, as Owen admits; indeed, Owen wrote his great work, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, by order of the Council of State for the express purpose of refuting Biddle and arresting the spread of his 'dangerous opinions.'<sup>2</sup>

The particular publication of Biddle which Owen was called upon to confute was the *Twofold Catechism*. Owen says that 'these catechisms had gone over seas,' 'that Nicholaus Arnoldus described the book as the most subtle insinuation of the Socinian religion that ever was attempted,' and that Maresius, Professor at Groning, 'on the account of these catechisms charges the whole nation and the governors

<sup>1</sup> Tayler, *Retrospect*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Calendar of State Papers*, Domestic Series, 2nd Mar., 1653-4.



of it with Socinianism and raises a fearful cry affirming that that heresy hath fixed its metropolitical seat here in England and is here openly professed, is the head sect of the nation displaying openly the banners of its iniquity, all which he confirms by instancing in this book of a Master of Arts of the University of Oxford.'<sup>1</sup>

The passage quoted by J. J. Tayler<sup>2</sup> occurs in the preface: 'To those that labour in the word and doctrine in these nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland.' 'Do not look upon these things as things afar off wherein you are little concerned; the evil is at the door, there is not a city, a town, scarce a village in England wherein some of this poison is not poured forth.'

The publication of the *Twofold Catechism* was rather the end than the beginning of Biddle's work. Ten years earlier he had been called upon to defend himself, and on the 2nd May, 1644, he made his first confession before the Gloucester authorities.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, the Epistle Dedicatory.

<sup>2</sup> *Retrospect*, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> I have lately found the order referring to this in the Sessions Book. It is as follows:—

'Civit, Glouc. Orders made at the General Quarter Sessions of the peace and Goale delivery holden for the city of Gloucester upon Monday next after the Clause of Easter Ano Regni Regis Caroli nunc Angliæ Vicessimo tempore Nichs. Webb, Major.

'It is thought fitt and ordered at this Sessions that the pson of John Bidle Schoolemaster of Crifte Schoole shall be secured till the Governor retaineth to th' end some further course may be taken concerninge him and his dangerous opinions.'

Soon after his examination he wrote the tract entitled *Twelve Arguments*, for which he was committed to prison in December, 1645; on the 8th of that month he was set at liberty upon his giving a bond to surrender himself when called upon by the Committee of Parliament. Archbishop Ussher had a conference with him in June, 1646, and he was subsequently summoned to appear before the Committee of the House of Commons; on the 1st April, 1647, he wrote an appeal to Sir Harry Vane which was unsuccessful; in 1648 while still in prison he printed *A Confession of Faith in the Holy Trinity*, and in the same year the 'cruel ordinance' for the punishment of blasphemies and heresies, was introduced into the House of Commons, especially directed against Biddle; the ordinance was not passed, but Biddle remained in prison till 1651, when political changes led to his release.

Biddle had then been before the public as a dangerous heretic for more than six years; he had published various tracts and been the subject of persecution; and consequently many persons had been attracted by him, and in London especially he had made converts. When he was set at liberty he made a practice of meeting every Sunday with these followers, when he expounded the Scriptures and discoursed upon them.<sup>1</sup>

This appears to have been the first gathering which might be called a Unitarian meeting or con-

<sup>1</sup> Toulmin, p. 65.

gregation in England. As his hearers regarded Biddle as their head or pastor they were called 'Bidelians' though they were also called Socinians from their agreement in opinion concerning the unity of God and the humanity of Jesus Christ with the followers of Socinus. 'But the name which most properly characterized their leading sentiment and their detachment from any implicit adherence to any teacher was that of Unitarian.' 'This,' continues Toulmin, 'was the rise of English Unitarians.' They were even then distinguished by the freedom and sincerity in judging of the controverted articles of religion which has ever since distinguished their successors. In 1654 he published the *Twofold Catechism*, for which he was ordered again to appear before the House of Commons and was committed to prison, the catechism itself being burned by the common hangman by order of the Parliament.

There is therefore much more due to Biddle than Tayler seems to allow him, for the publicity given to his opinions, not only by his writings and conversations, but also by the repeated persecutions of which he was the subject, largely tended to the diffusion of them, especially as 'he gave himself to the work with all the courage and devotion of a martyr,' and sought every opportunity of proclaiming and defending his opinions and never submitting to be silenced. So alarmed indeed were the authorities at the success attending his efforts and finding persecution ineffectual in suppressing them, that as I have

already mentioned, they at last adopted the more rational method of calling upon a great theologian, Dr. John Owen, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, to confute him. Biddle's Catechism is only a tiny pamphlet, but Owen's confutation of it is a solid volume of about seven hundred pages, which shows how much importance the learned doctor attached to the contents of the Catechism.

On the dissolution of Parliament Biddle obtained his liberty, but in 1655 was again apprehended and committed to Newgate under the ordinance of 1648, though it had never received the force of law. The Protector, not wishing to see Biddle condemned to death and being unable to secure his acquittal, on his own responsibility detained him in prison, and finally to settle the difficulty, banished him to Scilly, where he remained for three years, assisted by an annuity granted him by Cromwell, when he was allowed to return to London. In 1662 he was arrested at his lodgings, where he and some friends had met for divine worship, and he was committed to prison for the last time. In a few weeks his health was so injured by the unwholesome condition of the place where he was confined that his life was endangered, and at last, but too late, the sheriff permitted him to be removed; he died on the second day after his removal, September 22nd, 1662, in the forty-seventh year of his age.

The author of the *Short Account* of his life in one brief paragraph describes his peculiar difficul-

ties and at the same time presents a justification for our regarding John Biddle as the father of English Unitarianism. 'He, treading a path long overgrown with briars and thorns of error and sophistry, it required vastly greater labour and diligence to find out the way of truth, in which no Englishman had, by any appearing footsteps, gone before him for many ages.'<sup>1</sup>

He was truly a martyr, for though he was not put to death by the hand of the executioner, his life was prematurely taken from him by the slower, but no less certain process of repeated imprisonment.

As John Biddle played so important a part in the history of English Unitarianism he deserves a few more lines before we pass to its more recent and better known representatives. He was the son of a woollen draper at Wotton-under-edge in Gloucestershire, a small town about twenty miles south of the cathedral city, where he was born in 1615. He was educated in the grammar school of that town and before he was ten years of age displayed so much promise and signs of genius as to attract the notice of his neighbours, and Lord Berkeley conferred upon him (amongst other scholars) an exhibition of ten pounds a year, the distinction in Biddle's case being the early age at which he received this token of success. Before he left the school he translated the Eclogues of Virgil and the two first Satires of Juvenal into English verse and composed

<sup>1</sup> *Short Account*, p. 10.

an oration in Latin upon the death of a schoolfellow. These were afterwards printed in London 'with the approbation of some learned men.' He was admitted a student of Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1632. He took the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the usual course and that of Master was conferred upon him in 1641. On the 25th of May in the same year he was chosen by the Corporation of Gloucester on account of 'his piety, learning, integrity, and discretion'<sup>1</sup> for the post of master of the Crypt School in that city, where he was received with expressions of joy and respect. While fulfilling his duties as master of this school his religious disposition led him to a closer study of the Bible, 'the Scripture was his only authority and reason the only authentic interpreter.'<sup>2</sup>

It is said that he committed to memory the whole of the New Testament as far as the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation, not only in English but in Greek. He knew nothing at that time of the writings of the Socinians, but from the study of the Bible alone he arrived at the conclusion that the common doctrine of the Trinity was not well founded in revelation much less in reason. Making known these sentiments to his friends, the discovery of his heretical tendency led to his being summoned before the magistrates, or more probably the Parliamentary Committee sitting in Gloucester, and led to all the persecutions which followed.

<sup>1</sup> *Gloucester Corporation Records.*      <sup>2</sup> Toulmin, p. 13.

It is unnecessary to discuss his opinions; beginning tentatively he was gradually led by his studies and his experience to more definite conclusions. At first he expressed doubts about the personality of the Holy Ghost and ended by rejecting the doctrines of the deity of Christ, the atonement, and everlasting punishment.

As we have seen his most important piece of work was the *Twofold Catechism*, which led to his prosecution in 1654. The characteristic of this catechism is that the answers to the questions are given in the words of Scripture 'without note or comment.' The title shows that his intention was to recommend Scripture truth and not his own opinions. It is also peculiarly interesting as showing that the idea proclaimed by Dr. John Taylor and commended by Dr. Martineau of being 'mere Christians' is a Unitarian idea and was advocated by John Biddle one hundred and two years before Taylor preached his famous sermon at Norwich. If for this reason alone the title is worth reproducing:

'A Twofold Catechism. The one simply called a Scripture Catechism, the other a brief Scripture Catechism for Children.

'Composed for their sakes that would fain be *Mere Christians*, and not of this or that sect, inasmuch as all the sects of Christians, by what names soever distinguished, have either more or less departed from the simplicity of Scripture.'

It would be altogether to misunderstand Biddle

if it were supposed that he were a mere controversialist. The desire of his heart was to promote piety and not to obtain popularity by opposition to accepted doctrines. 'He valued not his doctrines for speculation but for practice' and his own life was irreproachable; even those who clamoured for his punishment are said to have admired his strict exemplary life, full of modesty, sobriety, and forbearance. That his life was a disinterested one is beyond question, for the sake of religion he forfeited all those advantages which would naturally and easily have fallen to a man of his character, genius, and learning. Piety, virtue, fortitude, and humility were his own characteristics and he held that justice and charity were the chief essentials necessary to salvation. In all these things he formed a striking and admirable contrast to the intolerant spirit of the Presbyterians in the House of Commons who persecuted him almost to death.

When Biddle began his inquiries the Puritan reformation was in progress. Episcopacy was overthrown, the Presbyterians were assembled at Westminster busy in constructing a new creed and projecting a new ecclesiastical tyranny, the Independents were valiantly defending civil and religious liberty, the Baptists, Quakers, and numerous other sects, as they were called, were making the most of their temporary freedom. There was not only war but religious ferment throughout the country. In the midst of this turmoil the Gloucester school-



master sat alone with his New Testament conscientiously endeavouring to arrive at the truth upon those great questions which, at the time, were everywhere being discussed. There is no name that more deserves to be honoured by English Unitarians than that of John Biddle, the humble yet fearless seeker after truth, who is now almost forgotten. The building in which he taught still stands in Gloucester, though the school flourishes on another site close by.<sup>1</sup> As I walk the streets of the city in which the father of English Unitarianism first pondered on the mysteries which absorbed his mind and sought the truth for which it may, without exaggeration, be said he died, as I daily pass the little chamber wherein he lodged, and sometimes stand within the schoolroom where he taught, I cannot help calling him to mind and honouring him for the way in which he bore witness against error, with such patient devotion, in face of persecution which pursued him to the end. My one regret is that no memorial stands to perpetuate his memory in Gloucester or elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> The old Crypt School adjoins the west end of the parish church of St. Mary de Crypt in Southgate Street, and is now used as a Sunday school for that parish.

## XI.

### LINDSEY, PRIESTLEY, AND BELSHAM.

**A**FTER the death of John Biddle no influential representative of anti-Trinitarian opinions appeared for many years. Thomas Firmin, a well-known and benevolent merchant of London, a disciple of Biddle's, though a conformist, was the main promoter of the Unitarian tracts, which made some stir about the end of the seventeenth century, and the publication of which gave rise to what is known as the Unitarian controversy. With the exception of Emlyn and W. Manning, no dissenting ministers appear to have avowed anti-Trinitarian opinions until about the time of the Exeter movement. Under the Toleration and Blasphemy Acts, anti-Trinitarian opinions could only be openly expressed by a dissenting minister at his peril, as Emlyn found out. Liberal religion took another form. In the Church it was represented by the Latitudinarians, and outside by the Deists; and it was rather a latent force than an expressed opinion among the Protestant Dissenters. The prohibition of Unitarian preaching by law no doubt led to some

evasion and concealment, and probably the public profession of ministers was not always in harmony with their private opinions; but anti-Trinitarianism was represented during the eighteenth century by such Dissenters as James Peirce, James Foster, Caleb Fleming, Nathaniel Lardner, John Taylor, and by others of less note.

It is from Theophilus Lindsey we date the beginning of open and organised Unitarianism—that is, Unitarianism avowedly professed by congregations and ministers. The law against the preaching of anti-Trinitarian opinions still existed, but there was little likelihood of its being enforced; the influence of Locke in particular had made the State interference with religious opinions practically impossible. Toleration had become a settled policy, and opposition to Unitarianism could only find vent in controversy and popular insult.

Mr. Lindsey, whom Mr. Gordon appropriately styles the father of Unitarian Churchmanship, was a heterodox clergyman who, finding it hopeless to strive for theological reform in the Church, resigned the living of Catterick in 1773, and in 1774 opened the first Unitarian chapel in the kingdom at Essex Street, London.<sup>1</sup> Lindsey hoped to inaugurate a new movement in connection with the Church, and had no intention of joining the Dissenters. He

<sup>1</sup> The first place of worship was a large room in Essex House, fitted up as a temporary chapel; the permanent chapel was built subsequently and was opened on 29th March, 1778.—*Memoirs*, pp. 63 and 88.

wished to found a reformed and free Church of England, and, instead of adopting a dissenting form of worship, introduced a revised Book of Common Prayer. Lindsey was personally a success, but his scheme was a failure, and very few followed him from the Established Church, but he exerted considerable influence over the liberal Dissenters, who rapidly embraced his views and proclaimed themselves Unitarian in his sense of the term, that is, as worshippers of the Father only.<sup>1</sup>

This strict and, as it appears to me, proper use of the name Unitarian, is apparently what has led some to refer to it as sectarian, because hitherto it had been applied to Arians, who, while believing in the unipersonality of God, did not think it improper to give a modified kind of worship to Jesus. How far this was consistent depends a good deal upon what was meant by worship. Emlyn wrote *A Vindication of the Worship of the Lord Jesus Christ on Unitarian Principles*, in which he establishes the point that the Scriptures never require us to pay *divine worship* to Jesus as he is distinct from the Father; but they do allow us to pay him an inferior religious worship. If by religious worship he only meant the highest degree of love and reverence, then there was not much difference between Emlyn and Lindsey, but some Arians probably went further.

<sup>1</sup> Amongst those who seceded from the Church with or soon after Lindsey may be mentioned Dr. Jebb, Dr. Disney, W. Frend, George Dyer, John Hammond, Gilbert Wakefield, and Theophilus Brown.

It is well, however, that the term should be clearly defined, and now for more than a hundred years Unitarian worship has been understood in Lindsey's sense.<sup>1</sup>

It is not necessary to say much about Lindsey, except that his chief aim was to promote piety and not opinion. His *Apology* is only a just and scriptural defence of the course he took in seceding from the Established Church, and his *Historical View of the State of Unitarian Doctrine and Worship* is, as its title implies, only indirectly controversial.

But, we are told, though he dealt with the controversial side of Unitarianism in his books, he disclaimed the intention ever to treat of controversial matters from the pulpit, and it was with some difficulty his friends overcame his reluctance to deviate from his plan of purely practical discourses.<sup>2</sup>

In the preface to his *Apology* Lindsey says that his design was something more than to vindicate his own opinions. 'The aim has been higher, whether attained or no : to promote that charity, without which a faith that can remove mountains is nothing ; and to excite some to piety, virtue, and integrity ; in which it will be accounted far happier to have succeeded, than in making the largest number of proselytes to any opinions.'

<sup>1</sup> But we are sometimes compelled to use the word Unitarian in the older sense when referring to anti-Trinitarians living before the word became restricted to its present use.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 73.

## JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

The influence of Lindsey's laudable effort might have died with him had it not been for his friend, Joseph Priestley. At the time they became acquainted Priestley was a Socinian, having been brought up as a Calvinist and passing through the Arian stage at an early period of his ministerial career. He began his ministry among the Independents, but on his appointment to his first charge, at Needham in 1755, his refusal to make an avowal of Evangelical sentiments excluded him from the benefits of the Congregational Fund, the love of intellectual and religious liberty which was so distinguishing a characteristic of his later life being thus early exhibited. 'He was determined not to be hampered by the doctrines of the State, nor by the sentiments of trustees.'<sup>1</sup> Priestley was in succession minister at Needham and Nantwich, tutor at Warrington Academy, and minister at Leeds ; but it is especially with his ministry at the New Meeting, Birmingham, that his name is associated with Unitarianism, a name to which he gave his approval and which he adopted.

It is unnecessary to give an account of Priestley's life, it is, or ought to be, well known to every Unitarian. It is with his character as a religious teacher that I am concerned, and to clear that character from misrepresentations that are frequently

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, *Heads*, p. 107.

made and have in some instances been endorsed by great authorities.

'There is,' we have been told,<sup>1</sup> 'the sectarian influence which dates from about the time of Priestley. Until his day there was no such thing as a Unitarian Chapel.'<sup>2</sup>

'Men like Priestley and Belsham easily turned their congregations into Unitarian audiences by driving away those who differed from them.'<sup>3</sup> It is not too much to say that eager controversialists of their stamp tended to become champions of a theology rather than Christian ministers, and to make their meeting-houses theological institutes rather than Christian churches.'

These are the depreciatory terms in which Dr. Priestley is referred to. They are so glaringly unjust that we can scarcely read them without indignation. We may admit that to us Priestley's style may seem formal, and his preaching lacking in emotion; but this was determined by the culture of the times in which he lived, and was not a personal defect. Emotional preaching of a kind was plentiful enough among the Methodists and other

<sup>1</sup> See *Two Opposing Tendencies*, pp. 17 and 22.

<sup>2</sup> The reason for this has already been explained.

<sup>3</sup> This was no new thing. The separation of the orthodox members of a congregation from the unorthodox was a frequent occurrence; it occurred in Dr. John Taylor's congregation at Norwich. Richard Baxter and Dr. John Taylor were quite as much 'eager controversialists' as Priestley and Belsham.

Evangelicals, and those Dissenters who preferred a manly piety and sound sense to mere emotion found themselves at home amongst the Unitarians. It is open to question whether the Unitarians of the present day who cultivate the religion of feeling more than their predecessors did are not in danger of being carried away by a tendency that is not altogether of the highest kind. Methodism, Sacramentarianism, and Christian Socialism are all examples of the religion of feeling. Unitarianism is not only a doctrine, but a mode of thought and a style of life in which feeling is not allowed to run wild, but is controlled by the understanding. There can be no true worship without emotion, and Unitarians are no exception; and in their worship, their communion with the Divine Spirit, their aspirations towards a more perfect life, they are moved by the deepest feeling, but they are under more restraint and less given to express their feelings than Evangelicals.

The piety of Priestley was deep and genuine, his earnestness was almost unequalled, and his love of freedom unsurpassable. His ideal of the ministerial life and duty was a high one, and his appreciation of church life greater and not less than that of his dissenting predecessors. 'He upheld,' says Mr. Gordon, "the absolute autonomy of the particular congregation, with a high ideal of the duty of each congregation to maintain the character of a living church. The decay of church organization, the



neglect of the sacraments, the disuse of catechizing, deeply concerned him. He revived among liberal Dissenters the spirit of congregational cohesion, protesting against the substitute of a mere pulpit for a living church.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, the truth is the very reverse of the statements quoted above.

It is true Priestley was an eager controversialist, he carried on his controversy with Bishop Horsley in a happy and vivacious manner, which shows he enjoyed it, but it was because he believed, with Milton, that discussion was the only way to get at the truth. But this discussion did not interfere with his work as a Christian minister, or lead to the neglect of those pastoral duties which he regarded as of first importance to the life of a church.<sup>2</sup> Neither did he, in controversy, display any unchristian temper or seek to take any unworthy advantage of an opponent.

Mr. Skeats can scarcely be accused of having any undue sympathy with the Unitarians, but he says of Dr. Priestley:—

‘Next in repute (to Lardner) stood Dr. Joseph Priestley, as distinguished for his philosophical attainments, his bold and, to himself, perilous advocacy of liberty as for his love of truth, his simplicity of character, and his purity of life. The

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, *Heads*, pp. 111, 112.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Appropriating the Sabbath Day to devotion, and the rest of the week to philosophical researches and controversial divinity.’—*Life of Joseph Priestley*, by John Corry, p. 19.

theological works of Priestley are an armoury of the most advanced Unitarian doctrines ; but to whatever extent he offended the great majority of his countrymen by the extremeness of his views he could not offend them by the style of his argument. No more candid or gentlemanly controversialist ever defended an unpopular cause, and no man less deserved the disgraceful treatment which he received from his countrymen.<sup>1</sup>

Better than any appreciation of my own is the consensus of admiration that for more than a hundred years has been called forth by the name of Joseph Priestley, 'Patriot and Saint and Sage' as Coleridge admiringly calls him in his *Religious Musings*, and of whom Dr. Samuel Parr said, 'He combined the innocence of a hermit with the simplicity of a patriarch.'<sup>2</sup>

At the unveiling of the statue of Priestley in Birmingham in 1874 many tributes were offered to his memory not only as a man of science but as a lover of freedom and a promoter of vital religion. On that occasion it is true that Professor Huxley laid great stress upon Priestley's devotion to the Unitarian cause, but even he saw more in this devotion than a mere love of controversy. Professor Huxley said,—'In season and out of season he was the steadfast champion of that hypothesis respecting the Divine Nature which is termed Unitarianism by its friends and Socinianism by its foes.'—'To this,

<sup>1</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 361. <sup>2</sup> Yates, *Vindication*, p. 22.

his highest ideal of duty, Joseph Priestley sacrificed the vulgar prizes of life, which, assuredly, were within easy reach of a man of his singular energy and varied abilities.'—'In this case he not only cheerfully suffered obloquy from the bigoted and unthinking but came within sight of martyrdom'—and he added 'Our purpose to-day is not to do honour to Priestley the Unitarian divine but to Priestley the fearless defender of rational freedom in thought and action.'<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Professor Huxley was attracted by this side of Priestley's character because he saw in it some resemblance to his own. A writer in *Fraser's Magazine* supplemented this aspect of Priestley's character with the following just remark, 'yet the man was sincerely religious, not the partisan of a sect only, but firmly persuaded that religion is the needful salvation of mankind.'<sup>2</sup> All through Dr. Priestley's non-controversial works we are impressed not by his insistence upon Unitarian doctrines, but by his ardent attachment to freedom and religion. Dr. Crosskey said on the same occasion, 'They looked upon that statue not only as one to Priestley but to human liberty in its most perfect form'—and of Priestley's religious spirit, Dr. Crosskey further said, in a sermon delivered in connection with this celebration, 'Religion was not merely one subject, which with intellectual curiosity he chose to study

<sup>1</sup> *The Priestley Memorial*, pp. 3 and 4.

<sup>2</sup> *The Priestley Memorial*, p. 87.

among many other branches of human investigation, it was 'the fountain and light of all his day, the master light of all his seeing.' and the same competent authority said 'His love of controversy was absolutely subordinate to his desire to persuade men to righteousness,' and that his *Discourse on Habitual Devotion* is one of the most thoroughly religious books in the English language.<sup>1</sup>

These sentiments are not unfounded or inspired merely by an enthusiasm for the subject of them, but were based upon and justified by Priestley's own teaching on the practical importance of religion. His sentiments are succinctly summarized in one eloquent paragraph—'Christianity,' he says, 'is less to be considered as a system of opinions, than a rule of life. But of what significance is a *rule* if it be not complied with? All the doctrines of Christianity have for their object Christian morals, which are none other than the well-known duties of life, and the advantage we derive from this religion is that the principles of it assist us in maintaining that steady regard to the providence of God and to a future state, which facilitates and ensures the practice of those duties, inspiring greater piety towards God, greater benevolence to man, and that heavenly-mindedness which raises the heart and the affections above those mean and low pursuits which are the source of almost all vices.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Priestley Memorial*, pp. 57, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Priestley, *The Evidences of Revealed Religion*, Vol. II., p. 409.

We may express ourselves in somewhat different terms, but I doubt if we can improve very much upon the general estimate of the value and aim of the Christian religion.

I have not included Channing in this story because he was not an English Unitarian, but he is so often contrasted with Priestley to the disadvantage of the latter that I may be pardoned for making one reference to him; there is a passage in his sermon on the same topic as the volume from which I have just quoted, the *Evidences of Christianity* which seems to be an echo of the above sentences, only the words have rather more sentiment in them—‘The end of Christianity is the moral perfection of the human soul. It aims and it tends, in all its doctrines, precepts and promises, to rescue men from the power of moral evil: to unite them to God by filial love, and to one another in the bonds of brotherhood; to inspire them with a philanthropy as meek and as unconquerable as that of Christ; and to kindle intense desire, hope and pursuit of celestial and immortal virtue.’<sup>1</sup>

The ‘piety,’ ‘benevolence,’ and ‘heavenly-mindedness’ of Priestley include all that Channing describes as the end and aim of Christianity.

That when Priestley was accidentally or providentially, drawn into controversy he carried it on with almost unequalled power and with a courtesy that was almost unknown at the time is

<sup>1</sup> Channing’s *Works*, 4to Ed., p. 215.

certainly to his credit and detracts nothing from his religious character ; it was not until he had suffered from the insults of his opponent that he allowed himself to indulge, not in vulgar abuse, but in a keen and polished irony which has found many imitators since. The great excellence of his controversial writings is that he introduced the critical historical method in place of the merely verbal and textual which was in vogue.

The Rev. J. J. Tayler took a more generous view of Priestley than some more recent critics and did him far more justice ; though he did not hesitate to express his wide divergence from some of Priestley's opinions, he was sensible of the greatness of his services in the cause of religious truth, and he fully recognized his heroic qualities.

Mr. Tayler says, 'In steadfastness of Christian principle, in ardour for truth, in purity of life and simplicity of purpose, and in genuine magnanimity and disinterestedness of spirit, Dr. Priestley stands pre-eminent and almost without a rival among the philosophers and men of science whose names shed a lustre on the close of the eighteenth century. His opinions on some points may be considered as a natural result and expression of the times in which he lived, supplying a link in that chain of connected thought which binds together in mysterious affinity the successive generations of civilised men. His place was assigned him by Providence. It is his highest praise to have filled it nobly, to have lived

for what he believed to be the truth, and to have sacrificed wealth and ease and worldly reputation in its defence and pursuit.'<sup>1</sup>

After such testimonies to the real moral and religious greatness of Joseph Priestley, it will be seen how far from the truth are those estimates of the man which represent him as a mere sectarian controversialist. His controversies were generally, if not entirely, carried on through the press, but his church was a true church where piety, virtue, benevolence, and heavenly-mindedness were taught and cultivated.

#### THOMAS BELSHAM.

A name intimately associated with the names of Lindsey and Priestley is that of Thomas Belsham, the successor of Dr. Priestley at Hackney and of Theophilus Lindsey at Essex Street Chapel. The Unitarianism of Belsham is sometimes spoken of as if it represented the high-water mark of Unitarian dogmatism, but this is probably only for the reason that his clear and cultivated intellect was impatient with all vagueness and ambiguity. Thus he could not see how Arians could logically be admitted to the Unitarian Society, and he was responsible for the introduction of the word 'idolatrous' into the preamble of its rules. This position, though not agreeable to some Unitarians, was certainly defen-

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Tayler, *Retrospect*, p. 298.

sible in 'an association of those who thought it right to lay aside all ambiguity of language and to make a solemn profession of their belief in the proper unity of God and of the simple humanity of Jesus Christ, in opposition both to the Trinitarian doctrine of Three Persons in the Deity and to the Arian hypothesis of a created Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world.'<sup>1</sup> As to the word 'idolatrous,' Mr. Belsham subsequently admitted, as it was regarded as offensive, that it might have been more prudent to have omitted it, but as it had been introduced many of the leading members of the society stood by it as a matter of principle.<sup>2</sup> In a broad sense the word is accurately used, but it has, especially in Scripture, obnoxious associations. Its use was no doubt a mistake, but it was the love of truth and sincerity, and not a sectarian or dogmatic spirit, that led to the introduction of the term.

The Catholic Creed-makers were animated by a passion for definition—scientific definition in theology it might be called. Nothing was to be left open or vague, every particular had to be defined in the most precise terms; their reasoning

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lindsey*, p. 196. Bishop Wilson had previously said that the Arians were 'guilty of a double blasphemy, first in asserting that Christ is not God, and secondly, in implying that, though he was not God, yet that he had an ambition to be thought so; though he was the humblest of men.'—*Maxims of Piety and Christianity*.

<sup>2</sup> Protestants generally do not hesitate to describe some particulars of Roman Catholic worship as 'idolatrous.'



was logical if their premisses were right. The Unitarians had something of the same logical spirit, and they challenged, not the conclusions, but the foundation of the Catholic Creeds. It is the absence of this love of accuracy, of precision in thought, which characterises the Evangelicals, more especially those of a latitudinarian cast. They are hazy, they use words without attempting to give them a definite signification, and pride themselves on an ambiguity which they mistake for liberality. They correspond to some extent to those impressionists in art who confound indefiniteness with breadth.

Belsham was educated for the ministry at Daventry Academy. His first appointment was to the pulpit of an Independent Chapel at Worcester; he was subsequently theological tutor at Daventry, then at Hackney College; he succeeded Dr. Priestley as minister at Hackney, and was finally appointed minister of Essex Street Chapel in succession to Lindsey and Disney. The pioneer work of Unitarianism had been effectually done by Lindsey and Priestley, and Belsham had a smoother road before him. He was a most capable organizer, and associated Unitarianism owes a great deal to him. His fame chiefly rests upon his literary work; he was an indefatigable student and writer, and the author of more than fifty published works. We are indebted to him for the admirable memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey, a volume which is full of interesting and authentic information relating to the progress of

Unitarianism during a period of about forty years. The *Calm Inquiry* summed up the Unitarian argument in a brief and masterly form; and he had a large share in the preparation of the *Improved Version* of the New Testament published in 1808 by the Unitarian Society.

The evolution of a Unitarian, to use a popular form of speech, is in no case so well illustrated as in that of Belsham. In 1781 he was appointed to the theological chair in the Daventry Academy, and was dissatisfied with the slight notice taken of the Unitarian controversy in Dr. Doddridge's Lectures, which was the text-book then in use there. The attention drawn to Unitarianism by the writings of Dr. Priestley, and the 'new and singular phenomenon of a flourishing congregation' of Unitarian Christians in Essex Street, made him feel it was his imperative duty to enter more fully into the question; for the purpose, it must be understood, of convincing his pupils of the 'superficial texture of Unitarian arguments' and confirming them in the orthodox belief. For this purpose Mr. Belsham formed a collection of all the passages in the New Testament which in any way related to the person of Christ, and arranged them under different heads; to these passages he added the comments of learned and approved Trinitarian, Arian, and Unitarian expositors, and left this compilation to produce its own impression upon the minds of his pupils. 'The first consequence of this mode of conducting his

lectures was to himself very unexpected, and not a little mortifying,' for, much to his surprise, many of his best pupils became Unitarian. He therefore devoted himself to a more careful study of the subject, but as he did so, year after year, he found himself going in the same direction, and he finally ended by adopting 'those opinions to which he had' certainly no previous attachment, and the erroneousness of which he once flattered himself he should easily have detected.' In 1789 he resigned his office with no other prospect than that of retiring into private life.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately this was not permitted, and it is doubtful if any minister has rendered more important services to the Unitarian cause than Thomas Belsham. The *Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine concerning the Person of Christ* justifies its title, for it is a model of controversial moderation. It contains the substance of Belsham's original theological lectures upon the subject in a condensed and revised form, and he examines the grounds for the various theories respecting Christ in a fair and undogmatic spirit. The thesis of the work is put into a sentence: 'If any one affirm that a being who has every appearance, and every incident and quality of a man, is not a real man, but a being of an order superior to mankind, it is incumbent upon him to prove his assertion. If he fail in his proof, his hypothesis vanishes, and the person in question

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the *Calm Inquiry*.

must be regarded as a real man.'<sup>1</sup> It is not, therefore, necessary for the Unitarian to prove the simple humanity of Jesus; if his deity or super-humanity cannot be proved, there is an end of the discussion, for no evidence is required to prove a man to be a man. With this proposition in view the alleged evidence to the contrary is calmly examined, with the result that the Trinitarian and Arian schemes are shown to be without proof as far as Scripture is concerned. This is, in a measure, admitted by the majority of Christians, who explain the Scriptures in the light of the creeds, and accept only such an interpretation as is sanctioned by the Church.

It is on this broad ground taken by Belsham that we affirm Unitarian Christianity to be un-doctrinal. Original sin, the Incarnation of Deity, vicarious sacrifice, which are the foundation doctrines of orthodox Christianity, are discarded as unscriptural and irrational, and no others are put in their place.

But this does not do away with the necessity for the occasional discussion of the orthodox doctrines which are insisted upon by the Trinitarian Churches, and are popularly supposed to be true. Sometimes it is a matter of imperative duty to undertake to show that they are not true; if the question were left open it might be possible to diffuse truth by simple and uncontroversial affirmations, but so long as error is proclaimed and supported by authority

<sup>1</sup> *Calm Inquiry*, p. 2.

no one who is a lover of truth can maintain silence without neglecting a plain duty. This was the principle that animated Mr. Belsham. Commenting on Lindsey's resolution not to introduce controversial matters into the pulpit, he says: 'But if popular and pernicious errors are not to be combated, and if the plain, simple doctrine of Christianity is not to be taught from the pulpit, it is difficult to see how public attention is to be excited, how the mass of hearers is to be instructed, and how truth is to make its way. In fact, it appears that where public teachers have confined themselves to moral instruction, and have not touched at all upon Christian doctrine, or have veiled their real opinions under ambiguous language, the consequence has often been that the teacher, by reading and reflection, has become enlightened, while the hearer has been left in darkness; the preacher has reformed his speculative creed, while the hearers have retained all the erroneous and unscriptural notions which their pastor has long ago renounced.'<sup>1</sup>

If it is the duty of a minister to lead his hearers to God, and to persuade them to fulfil the law of Christ, it is no less his duty to bear witness to the truth; error will not yield without a struggle, and truth does not prevail by its own latent force, however much we may think it ought to do so. It has to conform to the general conditions of the struggle for existence, and to maintain itself against a variety

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lindsey*, p. 73.

of competing forces, and the advocate of truth must not shrink from the less agreeable task of devoting a considerable part of his energies to the extirpation of error. Mr. Lindsey himself, in spite of his resolution to the contrary, found this necessity laid upon him. In a letter to Dr. Jebb, he says : 'Yesterday I ventured to deviate from the idea which you and my friends with you seemed to entertain as right, of preaching merely practical discourses, and enlarged with much earnestness on *John* xvii. 3. I find it was acceptable to many, and that it was even looked for, that I should sometimes treat upon the great object and principle on which our Church is formed, in order to confirm some that are already come out and awaken others to come out of Babylon.'<sup>1</sup>

The preaching of what are called positive affirmations alone is not sufficient, for they are sure to be met with equally positive affirmations on the other side, and the truth can only be arrived at by discussion, by the examination and presentation of evidence. 'How unbecoming, then, is it,' said Belsham, 'for those who hold a better and purer faith to shrink from the public profession and defence of it, and to leave the adversary master of the field.'<sup>2</sup>

No doubt those who condemn Unitarians like Priestley and Belsham for the controversial character of some of their books and sermons do so in the belief that truth will prevail by its own inherent

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 75.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

energy, but one form of that energy is manifested in opposing error, and the more earnestly and plainly error is resisted the better chance there is for truth to prevail. There are times when this opposition is not only excusable but unavoidable, and this is especially the case when truth is in a minority; no reformation was ever yet effected without controversy, and error which is not proved to be error easily retains its place in popular estimation. This was what Belsham plainly saw, and his opposition to the Trinitarian doctrines was therefore deliberate, and, being deliberate, was all the more effectual. While, therefore, allowing all that can be claimed for what is called non-controversial preaching, and the greater part of a minister's work must naturally be of this character, it must be admitted that teaching of another kind is no less indispensable, as Milton, with indisputable sagacity, affirmed. 'Some also were indued with a staid moderation and soundness of judgment to teach and convince the rational and sober-minded; yet not, therefore, that to be thought the only expedient mode of teaching, for in times of opposition, when either against new heresies arising, or old corruptions to be reformed, this cool, impassionate mildness of positive wisdom is not enough to damp the ardour and astonish the proud resistance of carnal and false doctors.'<sup>1</sup> We may, therefore, allow a place, and no mean place, for the great masters of controversy.

<sup>1</sup> Milton, *An Apology for Smectymnus*.

The publication of an improved translation of the Scriptures was an enterprise which was conceived by Priestley in 1789, and some progress had been made with the work by a company of scholars when, in 1791, the destruction of Priestley's manuscripts put an end to it for a time. The Unitarian Society, which was formed in the same year, made the translation of the new Testament one of its main objects. Instead, however, of securing the services of a number of scholars to carry out the work, they decided to avail themselves of some version already before the public. An application was made to Gilbert Wakefield for leave to introduce his translation into the Society's catalogue ; Mr. Wakefield gave his consent, but his bookseller raised objections. The West of England Unitarian Society then projected a translation, but this was abandoned owing to the death of the Rev. T. Kenrick. The matter was deferred till, in 1806, the Unitarian Society resolved that the undertaking should be no longer delayed. With the caution that marked the proceedings of the Society throughout, it was decided not to venture on a new Unitarian translation, and Archbishop Newcome's translation was selected with the consent of the owner of the copyright. 'The reasons for selecting this version were that, though not faultless, it was in the main excellent, that the style in general was simple and unaffected, that the translation was fair and impartial, that it rectified many errors in the public version, but



chiefly because the learned prelate had, in his translation, followed the corrected text of Griesbach.'<sup>1</sup> The Unitarian Society, however, did not simply reprint Newcome's Version, but made it the basis of an Improved Version. Where the editors judged it to be absolutely necessary to revise the Primate's version attention was always called to the variation from his text, so that Newcome was not made responsible for more than actually belonged to him. In addition to these corrections, the Improved Version contained notes especially explanatory of passages which are generally matters of controversy between Trinitarians and Unitarians. In some things the editors of the Improved Version only anticipated the labours of the New Testament Revision Committee of more recent date, in some things they went beyond them. The publication of the Revised Version is a practical admission of the principle which animated Mr. Belsham and his co-workers in the Unitarian Society; they contended that neither the received text nor the Authorised Version ought to be considered final, but that there was a necessity for a continually improving translation. Their own work was naturally, in the main, of only temporary value, and the same may be said of the Revised Version, for any mere revision must perpetuate many of the faults of the older versions. The Improved Version was put forth as the best that the then state of Biblical criticism would

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lindsey*, p. 303.

permit, but it was admitted to be capable of further improvement. In a scholarly preface the editor gave a succinct account of nearly all that was then known upon the subject. The chief credit for this version, after Newcome, belongs to Belsham, though he refrains from claiming it and modestly conceals himself behind the editors.

Lindsey, Priestley, and Belsham are names that are inseparably associated. Lindsey inaugurated Unitarian Churchmanship, Priestley led the Dissenters into Congregational Unitarianism, and Belsham organized Unitarians and systematised Unitarian opinion. All three had much the same characteristics and experience; they were religious men who had come to feel that the Trinitarian doctrines were an impediment to vital Christianity, but they had come to this conclusion gradually and reluctantly. They did not do so until the conviction was forced upon them by years of study and patient investigation; it was against their worldly interests, but they took the risk and made the sacrifice. It is of little importance now if we do not accept all their opinions; they were pioneers, and cleared the ground which others have tilled and planted. Their names still deserve to be honoured, and their memories gratefully cherished, for their incomparable services to the cause of Unitarian Christianity.

## XII.

### THE UNITARIAN SOCIETIES.

**A**S some kind of organization, fellowship or association is always recognised as indispensable to give permanence to any form of religion in which a number of people are interested, both for their own protection and the furtherance of their objects, it was only natural that the Unitarians should seek to secure the advantages to be derived from this general practice. In the year 1791 the Unitarian Society was formed; though the name by which this association was known described it as formed for promoting Christian knowledge and virtue by the distribution of books, it also served as a union by which Unitarians became known to each other, and afforded a means of mutual support and encouragement. It also served to diffuse a knowledge of their principles, and they hoped it might contribute to the spread of practical Christianity. That these were the objects of the Society is to be gathered from the Declaration of its founders, from which it will be seen that its aim

was to promote religion by the simple method of circulating Unitarian literature. Mr. Belsham drew up the preamble to the rules, which opens as follows: 'Preamble to the Rules of the Unitarian Society agreed upon at a General Meeting, February 9th, 1791. Michael Dodson, Esq., in the chair.'

'Christianity, proceeding from God, must be of infinite importance, and a more essential service cannot be rendered to mankind than to advance the interests of truth and virtue; to promote peace, liberty, and good order in society; to accelerate the improvement of the species and to exalt the character and secure the greatest happiness of individuals by disseminating the right principles of religion, and by exciting the attention of men to the genuine doctrine of Revelation.'

'This is the chief object of the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the practice of virtue, by distributing of books, etc.'

The preamble then goes on to state the principles which unite the members of the Society together, but these first sentences describe the *object* of the Society, which was not merely or even primarily formed for the propagation of Unitarian opinions, as they are called, but for the promotion of Christian knowledge and virtue by Unitarians. The inclusion of virtue is important, and should not be overlooked, for with their principle of worship Unitarians have always held that salvation is not to be attained by the acceptance

of doctrines, but by the practice of virtue. The worship of the Father and the service of man by an upright and benevolent life is a summary of Unitarian Christianity.

The preamble goes on to state some of the principles of Christianity as they were conceived by the Unitarians of 1791, in opposition to what they called the 'foreign opinions' which men had attached to the primitive system of Christian teaching: but their aim was to promote what they believed to be the simplest and purest form of Christianity by the means of books. How well this object was kept in view may be gathered from a sermon preached by the Secretary,<sup>1</sup> the Rev. J. Joyce, at the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Society, in 1816.<sup>2</sup>

The text the preacher took for his discourse was, 'But they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph,' *Amos* vi. 6.

Joseph was taken as representing the poor, and the first part of the sermon was an historical inquiry into the causes of the decay of States, which the preacher attributed in a great measure to an indifference to the condition of the masses on the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Belsham was the first secretary.

<sup>2</sup> The Title is characteristic of the period. '*The subserviency of free inquiry and religious knowledge among the lower classes of society to the prosperity and permanence of a state, attempted to be shown in a discourse delivered before the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, at Essex Street Chapel, on Friday, March 29, 1816, by the Rev. J. Joyce.*'

part of the wealthier classes. He then gave instances of the sufferings of the poor, much in the spirit of some of the social reformers of to-day, and argued that the Christian Church should be marked by disinterested benevolence, that every disciple ought to follow the example of his great law-giver, Christ. The result of efforts to promote Christian knowledge would be the diminution of ignorance and suffering ; and in promoting the happiness and knowledge of our fellow-men we should be cherishing those tender feelings which are 'the chief ornament of the man and the Christian.'

There is scarcely anything in the sermon which can be called doctrinal. It is broadly human and intensely Christian. Such were the aims and objects of the Unitarian Society, and such were the sentiments proclaimed by its preacher and welcomed by its members.

The language of the 'Preamble' differs from ours ; it talks of accelerating the improvement of the species and exalting the character and securing the greatest happiness of individuals by disseminating the right principles of religion, while we should perhaps speak of endeavouring to spread the knowledge of truth, righteousness, and the kingdom of God ; but they meant the same thing ; just as when Priestley wrote of Christian duty, morality, and heavenly-mindedness he was using the then customary equivalents for 'righteousness,

peace, and joy in the holy spirit.' They preferred to use, for obvious reasons, the language of literature to that of Scripture.

The Unitarian Society was a religious society composed of religious people. It is true that the Preamble contains some definitions of Unitarian principles, but its object was to bring together people who held those principles, and who, because they held those principles, were excluded from or could not work in other religious associations; and they desired to promote a purer form of Christianity than that which was in vogue in orthodox churches.

The policy of the Society was not a very daring or adventurous one, it did its work very quietly and unostentatiously confining itself to its work of publishing and distributing books, hoping in this way gradually to influence for good the religious life of the country.<sup>1</sup>

No better testimony to the quiet and unobtrusive character of the work of the Unitarian Society could be offered than the subsequent establishment of the 'Unitarian Fund.' The first suggestion for the formation of the Fund Society came from Mr. David Eaton, a bookseller, who in 1796 first began to feel that something more should be done for the pro-

<sup>1</sup> It should be said that at the first Dinner of the Society in April, 1791, references were made to the political situation in France, which got into the next morning's papers, and provoked the displeasure of Mr. Burke. After this they resolved to leave politics alone. *Memoirs of Lindsey*, pp. 200, 201.

motion of Unitarian Christianity than the Unitarian Book Society was doing. In 1825 Mr. Eaton contributed a long account of the origin and work of the Fund to the *Monthly Repository*, and from this account we get a vivid and presumably correct impression of the spirit which animated the Unitarians of the earlier period, and from his words we may learn how far they were from being the sectarian controversialists they are sometimes represented to have been.

'Many of our old Presbyterian' congregations had gradually given up the Assembly's Catechism, and had silently become Arian, or in a more restricted sense, Unitarian. Without being indifferent to the importance of divine revelation, they trusted that by a practical and negative style of preaching<sup>2</sup> and by occasionally publishing sermons and tracts, calling in question or giving a new view of established doctrines; by commentaries, and essays in periodical publications, abounding with biblical research and criticism, and all tending to elicit truth, they should excite inquiry and undermine reputed orthodoxy. To the silent but sure operation of these means they trusted for a gradual alteration in the public religious belief, for they avowed their fears that bolder measures and greater exertions would only excite prejudice and angry hostility, and thus prevent the good that was

<sup>1</sup> For 'Presbyterian' read 'dissenting.'

<sup>2</sup> Negative, that is, as far as Unitarianism was concerned.



in progress. These fears pervaded not only the Presbyterian Churches but all the persons with whom I conversed at the time.' <sup>1</sup>

This quiet policy did not satisfy Mr. Eaton, who thought a more energetic policy was desirable, and saw no reason why the Unitarians should not follow the example of the Methodists and adopt a more popular style of preaching, and employ missionaries as well as distribute books. He drew up a plan for the formation of such a Society or Fund, and laid it before some of his friends. They advised him to send it to Mr. Lindsey, who expressed his approval of it, but his age and infirmity prevented him assisting in carrying it out. In 1802 Mr. Eaton went to London and made the acquaintance of Mr. J. T. Rutt. Mr. Rutt was at first alarmed at the plan, he saw too many difficulties in the way, and thought the time had not yet come for open propaganda; but afterwards Mr. Rutt was one of the earliest and most zealous supporters of the Fund.

In 1805, Mr. Aspland, by way of sounding the Unitarians upon the subject, wrote in favour of the proposal in the *Universal Miscellany*; he met with so much encouragement that a meeting was called at the house of Mr. Ebenezer Johnston, in Bishopsgate Street. There were seven gentlemen present, Messrs. Vidler, Aspland, Rutt, Christie, Holden, Johnston, and Eaton. They then and there formed themselves into a Society, to be called the

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, vol. xx. pp. 337 *et seq.*

Unitarian Fund. This was an event of historical importance to Unitarians, for it may be regarded as the beginning of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. This new organisation was widely announced and received general support, and so after eight years' efforts Mr. Eaton had the satisfaction of seeing his hopes realized. The first general meeting was held the next year, and Dr. Toulmin preached the first sermon. The objects of the Fund were to promote the Unitarian doctrines of Primitive Christianity by popular preaching, the circulation of tracts ; to assist poor congregations in carrying on religious worship, and to aid in the maintenance of missionaries. Twenty years later, when the 'Fund' was enlarged into the 'Association,' Mr. Eaton wrote :—' We can now scarcely go where there are not some Unitarians, and to but few considerable towns in the country where there are not one or more places of Unitarian worship erected to the sole worship of the One God and Father of all. Before the Fund existed, Unitarians were, it is well known, a standing topic of contemptuous animadversion to their zealous orthodox brethren, both in the Church and out of it ; no language was thought too pointed or severe on their coldness, deadness and indifference ; ridicule and sarcasm were called in to reprobate their legal notions, moral essays, etc. But now, so great has been the change, that they are crying out and sounding the alarm at the great and increasing zeal and numbers of the Unitarians. Cold or hot we cannot please them.'

The labours of those associated with the Fund had evidently put new life and fervour into the congregations, and it deserves to be remembered with gratitude.<sup>1</sup>

In 1819 a Society was formed for the protection of the Civil Rights of Unitarians.<sup>2</sup> In 1813 the Act of Parliament was passed which relieved Anti-Trinitarians from certain penalties; and it was presumed that it would extend to Unitarians the privileges possessed by the other denominations of dissenters, but proceedings in connection with the Wolverhampton Chapel had rendered it doubtful whether this object had been sufficiently secured; it appeared that though Unitarians were exempted from the penalties to which they had been liable under the Blasphemy laws, they were still practically unprotected by the common law. The threatened attack upon the property they held forced them to consider the propriety of taking some steps unitedly to defend their rights, and it was resolved to form an association for that purpose, which was outside the province of the Book Society and the Fund. The dissenting deputies of the three denominations had done a great deal for the extension of the civil rights of dissenters, but there were cases in which Unitarians alone were concerned, and in which the other deputies were unable or unwilling

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting sketch of the life of Mr. David Eaton, by Mr. Aspland, see *Christian Reformer*, 1829, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Monthly Repository*, 1819, p. 48.

to act. A meeting of Unitarians was held in London, 13 January, 1819, when it was resolved to form a Unitarian Association for the protection of the Civil Rights of Unitarians. In common with other dissenters, Unitarians still suffered under the disadvantages imposed by the Test and Corporation Acts, against which they continued to agitate until they were repealed in 1828. It was a substantial grievance also, especially to Unitarians, that with the exception of Quakers, all dissenters had to be married according to the rites of the Church of England. This also was a matter of agitation for many years, and relief was not obtained until 1836, when the Registration Acts were passed.

The British and Foreign Unitarian Association was formed in 1825. This was not a new Society, but the Unitarian Fund on an enlarged plan, its basis was widened and the scope of its operations extended. In the following year it was still further enlarged by amalgamation with the Book Society, and the Civil Rights Association was also incorporated, and thus all the aims and purposes of these separate organizations were focussed and the efficiency of them increased.

There is no need to recapitulate the history of the Association or attempt a record of the work it has done, they are to be found in the Annual Reports. For nearly three quarters of a century the Association has been the rallying point of Unitarians at home and abroad. It has assisted

ministers and congregations from its funds ; it has defended the civil rights of Unitarians ; it has contributed to the erection and repair of chapels ; it is the only society that has published and circulated the literature of a liberal theology. It has never had, nor attempted to exercise ecclesiastical functions, though it has occasionally assisted congregations and ministers by its advice, its committee and secretary being, by the circumstances of the case, better fitted than any other existing body to do so, but it has never dictated to any congregation nor interfered as an authority even in cases where difficulties have arisen.

If in 1825 Mr. Eaton could rejoice over the change that the Unitarian Fund Society had effected in the position of Unitarians, how much greater reason there is now to recognize the services of the Unitarian Association. At the beginning of the century Unitarians were despised, in 1825 they were feared, now they are respected ; they are recognized as a force in the religious life and thought of the country. The success of Unitarianism, the influence it now exerts, the general acceptance of its literature, and the adoption of its opinions by numbers who do not class themselves as Unitarians, are due more than anything else to the labours of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. It is the fashion in some quarters to regard it as a sectarian Society with sectarian aims ; it is unnecessary again to refute this charge, enough

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has already been said to show how unfounded it is ; though naturally the Unitarian Association is an association of Unitarians and not something else. The Association has done the work that no one else has done or thought of doing, and it does not appear to be the general opinion of those concerned that the time has yet come to supplant it by any new organization. Nor is it easy to see how a better one, for its purpose, could be formed ; the great advantage of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association is that it is not an ecclesiastical organization of Churches or ministers ; there is no test of membership, but it is naturally formed of those who sympathise with its objects. If the time ever comes when the Association is merged in some larger and more Catholic scheme, it will not be because its work is done, but only that a more efficient way has been found for carrying out the objects it has always had in view ; the cultivation of the fellowship of those Christians amongst whom the worship of One God and Father of all is the only bond of union, and the promotion of truth and virtue the primary aim ; and for the work it has accomplished it will deserve the everlasting gratitude of all lovers of religion and freedom.

It is not from want of knowledge of their services or from lack of respect and gratitude that I do not mention other societies and funds of a more local character, which have side by side with the central Society helped especially to sustain the

efforts of ministers and the missionary work of Unitarianism. In some respects their work has been so nearly akin to that of the larger association that nearly all that can be said of that applies in some degree to them ; except that it has promoted the union of all Unitarians in the kingdom, and it alone has done anything substantial in the literary department, which next to the pulpit itself has rendered the greatest service to the cause. One thing only remains to be said and that is that the Unitarian Association is not formed merely for the propagation of Unitarian opinions but for the promotion of Unitarian Christianity.

### XIII.

#### THE TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSY.

**I**T is sometimes said that the Trinitarian Controversy is passing away, that it no longer interests anyone.

If this is true it is largely due to the recognition of the fact on the part of the Trinitarians that their chances of success in the controversy are hopeless, and they prefer a truce to a contest in which they can see no prospect of victory. The Trinitarians would not have retired within their fortifications had they not felt that it was the best policy.

It appears to be imagined, and currency is given to the fiction in the most unexpected quarters, that it was the Unitarians at the latter end of the last century and the commencement of the present who were to blame for the Controversy which raged so fiercely for a number of years. An acquaintance with the literature of the Controversy would correct this misapprehension. The Unitarian principles, as expounded by Lindsey, Priestley, and Belsham, were positive enough ; but when they de-



clared that they separated themselves from other Christians because they believed that the Father only ought to be worshipped as God, the Trinitarians attacked them as unscriptural or atheistical because they did not worship the Triune God, or accept the Evangelical doctrines of original sin and the atonement. Then the Unitarians were compelled to justify themselves and to explain their reasons for their belief. They were, therefore, as a rule on the defensive, their controversial publications and sermons took the form of 'Apologies,'—'Reasons,' 'Remonstrances,'—'Vindications'—or 'Replies.' The attack came from the orthodox side, and if occasionally a well-equipped Unitarian like Dr. Priestley 'carried the war into the enemies' camp,' there was nothing very reprehensible in his doing so. Though the Unitarians most frequently confined themselves to defence and in trying to show that they were right, it unavoidably followed that sometimes, but not so frequently, they must try to show that their opponents were wrong.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Bishop of London has recently written some words in defence of theological works of a controversial character of another school which may equally be appropriate to the Unitarians: 'It is,' he says, 'inevitable that many of these works are of a controversial character. It is scarcely too much to say that most men have become theologians in spite of themselves. They have read and meditated and thought, till some tendency of popular thought ran counter to their ideas. They were bound to face this fact, to penetrate more deeply into the foundations of their own belief, and then to state their results and give their reasons at every stage. They had to make good their own position against opponents who

The chief difference in the two sides of the controversy was in the temper and style of the controversialists ; the Unitarians rarely, if ever, exceeded the bounds of charity and courtesy, their opponents as rarely kept within them.

I have already quoted the opinion of Mr. Skeats that 'no more candid and gentlemanly controversialist than Dr. Priestley ever defended an unpopular cause,' and no one who reads his chief controversy, that with Dr. Horsley, can question the justice of this opinion. That Dr. Priestley gives evidence of a calm sense of superiority over his opponent can scarcely be denied, but it only finds expression in a polite irony, which often reminds the reader of Matthew Arnold. It may be admitted that he could give a keen thrust when he thought his adversary deserved it, but in the main his criticism was purely historical ; he only descended to personal criticism when the insults of his opponent justified, if they did not demand, a retort ; such a retort for instance as closed the third part of his

often owed their importance merely to the fact that they had a strong body of floating opinion behind them. One part—often an ungrateful part—of their work was to clear away partial conceptions which rested on no solid basis. They had to destroy before they began to build. Even in our own day we have need to learn the temper and method in which a controversy may be conducted, so as to substitute accurate thinking for vague opinions or prejudices which have their root in the desire to maintain an existing system rather than to seek for truth.'—*General Introduction to the English Theological Library*, by the Lord Bishop of London (1898)

letters to Horsley. 'Boasting of more Christianity than you will allow to me, you ought to teach me by your example what it is that our religion requires in these cases, and not to give any occasion to an unlicensed teacher in a conventicle to instruct an Archdeacon of the Church of England in one of the first lessons in the Christian school.' If this was severe, it was not undeserved.<sup>1</sup>

After Lindsey's *Apology*, and Dr. Priestley's *Letters to Horsley*, the chief contributions to the Controversy on the Unitarian side were Belsham's *Calm Inquiry*, the *Vindication* and *Sequel* by the Rev. James Yates, and Dr. Lant Carpenter's *Reply to Archbishop Magee*. These works were for many years, and indeed may still be, standard works in defence of Unitarianism, they are marked throughout by scholarship, moderation, and an eminently Christian spirit.

'May the Unitarians of modern times,' said Mr. Yates, 'resemble those of the first ages, not merely in being the subjects of contemptuous defamation, but in returning at all times the language of gentleness and kindness, and of unremitting and invincible benevolence.'<sup>2</sup>

The opponents of the men who were animated by this admirable spirit only too frequently forgot to imitate it. Unitarians were called 'proud, deluded, ignorant believers in a lie,'—Unitarianism

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Dr. Horsley*, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> Yates, *Sequel to the Vindication*, p. 43.

was equal to the crime of atheism and downright rebellion against God himself.' In 1818 Captain Gifford addressed a Remonstrance to the Bishop of St. David's, in which he quoted some of the Bishop's 'censorious epithets.'

'Unitarianism is founded on all sorts of misrepresentations and unfounded assertions; but chiefly on a palpable untruth and a no less palpable absurdity.'

'Frivolous evasions,' 'Falsification of authorities,' and the 'Forgery of a Gospel Fact,' are forms of accusations made by the Bishop against the Unitarians, and he sums it all up by saying:—'The only wonder is that Unitarians should find readers who will accept their counterfeits of Scripture, and listen to the blasphemies of their God-denying apostacy.'

But the cream of these Controversial amenities is gathered from an article on the Unitarian Controversy between Yates and Wardlaw, which appeared in the *British* (quarterly) *Review*, March, 1821. The writer of this article says of the Unitarians:—

'They reject all supernatural doctrines; nay, they even deny some of the doctrines of natural religion, such as the omnipresence and universal agency of the Deity. They are conscious hypocrites; their writings are marked by contradictions and absurdities so palpable as to move our pity, and to humble us in our view of our common nature.'

'They are brazen, avowed, truculent infidels, leagued together against the majesty of heaven (*Conjurati cælum rescindere fratres*). They worship a non-entity, a phantasm, an airy nothing—they are atheists in the world.' 'In fine, it is hard to form a conception of any man more completely cut off from God.'<sup>1</sup> It is scarcely to be wondered at that the Unitarians wished that their critics would be less generous with their anathemas and more liberal with their arguments. Dr. Priestley, Mr. Belsham, Mr. Yates, and Dr. Carpenter, met all this kind of thing in a temperate and charitable spirit. They would have been wanting in manliness had they not defended themselves with all the vigour, learning and piety which they possessed; but it cannot be charged against them that they ever descended to insult and abuse, or met reviling with reviling.

If it is true that the Trinitarian Controversy is passing away I think it must be admitted that it is principally due to the change that has come over the Trinitarians themselves. The Unitarians have nothing to be ashamed of, but their opponents could not descend to the old level.

Another reason why the controversy has ceased is that it is no longer denied that the Bible may legitimately be interpreted in a Unitarian sense even though it is denied that it is the proper and only reasonable sense. But perhaps a stronger

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in a sermon by Rev. S. C. Fripp delivered at Bristol 6th January, 1822.

reason still is that the belief in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures is no longer held on either side. No Trinitarian could now argue on the lines taken by the lecturers in the Liverpool Controversy, one of whom said—‘Let the Unitarians speak out and say whether they believe in the plenary inspiration of the Bible or not.’—‘In the same proportion as they shall be found surrendering *one book, one chapter, or one verse* of the book of God, as possibly genuine, probably authentic, but in their judgment *uninspired*, their system tends to infidelity.’<sup>1</sup> This kind of argument is confessedly out-of-date. The tone of these lectures is milder than that of the writers quoted above, but it was still marked by the same spirit of intolerance and bigotry. The first lecturer defended himself from the charge of speaking of the state of Unitarians as hopeless, by saying, ‘Our infallible knowledge of the doom of such, is derived exclusively from this *infallible* revelation—*he that believeth not shall be damned*,’ and the first lecture is dedicated by the author to his brethren who have co-operated with him in the effort ‘to vindicate His Name and truth from the degrading Assumptions of the GOD-DENYING HERESY OF UNITARIANISM, ETC.’ The change that has come over the controversy is not only to be seen in the absence of such language and the more courteous treatment Unitarians now receive on all hands; but also in another way in the manner in

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Fielding Ould, *Unitarianism Confuted*.

which the Unitarians now justify their withdrawal from communion and worship with Trinitarian Churches.

During the Trinitarian Controversy, say from 1770 to 1840, the usual method on both sides was to appeal to Scripture; an enormous amount of learning was expended upon the interpretation of the text by men whose Biblical scholarship and knowledge of Hebrew and Greek was probably far greater than that of most men of the same class to-day; it was for clergy and ministers alike one of the principal fields of study. Some few like Dr. Priestley went further and carried their inquiries into the historical field, but the ordinary controversialists appealed to Scripture and perseveringly repeated the arguments of such apologists as Lindsey and Belsham, arguments which are still useful if appeal is made to the New Testament, and when a clergyman left the Church of England or a minister left the Evangelical dissenters he generally defended himself by discussing at great length the textual authority for Unitarianism. On both sides the greatest interest was taken in this kind of controversy, and it is true that this kind of interest has nearly passed away. When a few years ago, a distinguished clergyman left the Church, for much the same reasons as Theophilus Lindsey, and published a statement of his reasons, he did not attempt to justify himself by a discussion of scripture evidences. He simply said—‘In the paper

which I sent to my congregation, I stated that the main reason for my departure from the Church was that I had ceased to believe that miracles were credible, and that, since the English Church founded its whole scheme of doctrine on the miracle of the Incarnation, a disbelief in that miracle put me outside the doctrine of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, I do not believe in miracles, nor in doctrines based upon miracles; and there the matter ends and no Trinitarian appears to be disposed to enter into controversy with the writer. It really appears as if Trinitarians had ceased to take sufficient interest in their own doctrines to think them worth defending, and consequently the controversy is passing away.

The Unitarians have always said in effect, 'We withdraw from worship and communion with Trinitarians because we believe that their doctrines are erroneous and their worship misdirected. We are interested in religion and not in dogma; but when called upon to give our reasons and justify our conduct we are always ready to do so.' Both sides were in earnest and acted in accordance with their convictions. If now some Trinitarians are willing to agree that doctrine or dogma is of secondary importance when compared with a religious life and spirit, there is, of course no necessity on our part to dispute a sentiment which has animated English Unitarians from the days of John Biddle till now.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, *The Triumph of Faith*, p. 164.



#### XIV.

#### UNDOGMATIC UNITARIANISM.

**D**OGMATIC Unitarianism is a contradiction in terms, but lest I should be thought to overlook a defect from which Unitarians, like all other Christians, though in a far less degree, have not been entirely exempt, I allow myself to use the expression without prejudice to the principles of English Unitarianism. That is to say, while I admit that some Unitarians may have shown a spirit which may be called dogmatic, I affirm that in doing so they have departed from Unitarian principles.

I have already shown that Unitarianism is synonymous with intellectual freedom; and this recognition of the liberal spirit of our religion was not confined to exceptional cases, but was also fully recognised by the less distinguished, but not less worthy representatives of English Unitarianism.

‘Whilst Unitarians, notwithstanding their differences of opinion upon many topics, maintain the spirit of unity and natural affection, they may avoid

contracting a careless indifference to truth. Indeed, their constitution furnishes them with singular advantages in pursuing it, because a change of sentiment founded upon inquiry, is not attended with a painful separation from former religious connections; and while by uniting as *Worshippers of the Father only*, they are free from those impediments to further investigation which would arise from a sub-division into parties, they have every opportunity of assisting one another by friendly discussion and the mutual communication of their sentiments.<sup>1</sup>

This may be sufficient to show that English Unitarians have always fully understood and held that there may be union for worship, and fellowship in service and at the same time perfect freedom of opinion.

It is unfortunately true that there have been at one time and another some Unitarians who have not sufficiently realised this, and who would, if they could have had their way, have imposed a uniformity of belief upon the ministers and members of Unitarian churches and societies, but they have never been able to do so, the Unitarian love of liberty has been too strong for them. It is unfair to charge upon Unitarianism the faults of some few of its professors, who have not been altogether loyal to its principles probably only because they failed to understand them. No better account of an instance of this dogmatic spirit to which I have referred can

<sup>1</sup> Yates—*Sequel to the Vindication*, p. 10.

be found than one given by Theodore Parker, in his *Discourse on Matters pertaining to Religion*. The charge made by Parker against certain Unitarians of his time in America is after all one of the most splendid defences of Unitarian principles ever written, for Parker contended that the dogmatic spirit of the then present Unitarians was contrary to the broad and liberal spirit of original Unitarianism.

'At first,' he says, "'the Unitarian heresy," as it was presumptuously called, was a protest against the unreasonable and unscriptural doctrines of the Church; a protest on the part of reason and conscience; an attempt to apply good sense to theology and to reconcile knowledge with belief, reason with revelation, to humanize the Church.' 'It held to the first positive principle of the Reformation, the Bible and private judgment.' 'It was a statement of reasons for not believing certain doctrines, very justly deemed not scriptural. Thus it protested against the Trinity, total depravity, vindictive and eternal punishment, the common doctrines of the satisfaction of Christ, the malevolent character ascribed to the God of popular theology. It recommended a deep, true morality lived for its own sake.' 'To make sure of heaven, it demanded a manly life, laying more stress on character than creed—in point of moral and religious life, as set forth in the two Great Commands, its advocates fear no comparison with any sect.' 'It had a great work to do, and it did it nobly. The spirit of reformers was in its

leading men. The sword of polemic theology rarely fell into more just and merciful hands. But the time has not come to celebrate with due honour the noble heart, the manly forbearance, the Christian heroism of those who have gone where the weary are at rest or who yet linger here.' <sup>1</sup> Such was Theodore Parker's generous tribute to the early Unitarians, but he complained that at the time he was writing some of their successors had lost much of this original spirit. He adds: 'Still, however, it seems there always were in their ranks men who thought freedom was too free, "that there must be limits to free inquiry," and Unitarians must have a creed.' And he adds, in a note, 'It has since been made, and such a creed!'

Parker distinctly says this was not in harmony with the original Unitarian principles. 'Thus the old school assumes a position abhorred by primitive Unitarianism, which declared that free inquiry should never stop short but with a conviction of truth.' <sup>2</sup>

Dogmatism amongst the Unitarians was an episodic and not a permanent characteristic; how far a similar reaction set in in England I am not able to say. I can find no evidence that it ever went so far, but that at one period a dogmatic spirit was manifested by some members of the Unitarian Association is unquestionable. In 1865 the Rev.

<sup>1</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, pp. 309, 310. (Trübner, 1876.)

<sup>2</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, p. 313.

John James Tayler, in a letter to the Rev. James Martineau, wrote: 'In the intervals of thought I have again and again recurred with much earnestness to the present condition of our own religious body, and the efforts we must all make during the next nine months to prevent a disastrous disruption into the two extremes of a vague, aimless assertion of mere free inquiry on one hand and of a narrow, uncritical, and untenable dogmatism on the other.'<sup>1</sup>

I do not think it too much to say that the efforts made by Mr. Tayler and his friends were successful, if not at the time, at least in the fruit they have borne since, and the Unitarian Association has avoided the extremes of aimless free inquiry and untenable dogmatism and has maintained the standard of liberal Christianity. Under the influence of such teachers as Theodore Parker and John James Tayler the spirit of the primitive Unitarianism revived, elevated, perhaps, on a more spiritual plane, and very soon swept the dogmatism of the Unitarian middle ages out of our churches and societies, or at least kept it in subjection. Unitarianism must not be judged by the accidental features of a passing phase, but by its abiding characteristics and principles. Theodore Parker's criticism could not be justly applied to English Unitarianism at the present time.

If 'dogmatic Unitarianism' is a contradiction in terms, 'undogmatic Unitarianism' is tautology; for Unitarianism is undogmatic Christianity. This has

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Tayler, *Letters*, Vol. II., p. 258.

been acknowledged in recent years by the advocates of dogmatic religious instruction, who have repeatedly affirmed that undogmatic religious teaching is nothing but Unitarianism. This may not be fair to all advocates of undenominational teaching, many of whom have no sympathy with Unitarianism, but it is a recognition of the fact that Unitarians are undogmatic.

So far as I know, the English Unitarians are the only body of Christians who have not adopted a confession of faith. At least from the time of the Council of Nicea it has been the usage of all churches to publish some form of creed or declaration of faith. A complete list would be difficult to form, but it is easy to call to mind the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Articles of the Church of England, the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration, the Heads of Agreement, the Salters' Hall Subscription, the various forms which Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, and other Churches have required their ministers and members to accept. The English Unitarians stand alone in their continuous rejection of subscription. They might have been excused had they followed the universal custom, *but they have not done it*. This is not mere assertion on my part or on the part of present day Unitarians, it has always been one of their principles, and it has been their consistent policy. The opponents of Unitarianism have made it a ground of complaint

that the Unitarians have no creeds, articles, or formularies. 'It must be obvious that in endeavouring to ascertain the doctrinal sentiments of a sect which boasts of its freedom from creeds, articles, and formularies, considerable difficulty must be encountered, it is so easy and convenient withal for each particular member to disclaim any responsibility for what has been advanced by another, however venerated he may be in reality for his talents, or silently considered as a standard of appeal.'<sup>1</sup>

This was not intended to be complimentary, but it is an unconscious testimony to the undogmatic character of Unitarian Christianity. This writer described as a fault and an inconvenience to himself and his colleagues that very characteristic which Unitarians claim as one of their chief glories, the undogmatic and progressive character of their theology. But he had not grasped, and there are others still who have not grasped, the fundamental principle of English Unitarianism, though it has been set forth for more than a hundred years. Unitarians are united by a religious principle, and not by any uniformity of opinion; this is what they assert, and it is what their opponents admit. Unitarian Christianity is undogmatic and unsectarian Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Fielding Ould, *Unitarianism Confuted*. Preface to first lecture, p. v.

## XV.

### CONCLUSION.

**B**EFORE concluding this brief sketch of a story which has covered more than two hundred years, the results may be shortly summarized. We began with the Presbyterians and saw, what, indeed, no one questions, that they were dogmatic, intolerant, and persecuting, Calvinists in theology, believers in the divine right of the Presbytery, demanding ecclesiastical uniformity both in church government and forms of worship, and upholders of a State-established religion. The Dissenters, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers, though uniting with the Presbyterians for the purpose of abolishing the Episcopal Church, were staunch defenders of congregational liberty, and their irreconcilable opposition happily prevented the establishment of a National Presbyterian Church. Baxter, though generally, but incorrectly, called a Presbyterian, and held up as a model of Catholicity, was in reality a moderate Episcopalian and, at least until nearly the close of his life, rigidly orthodox, and an



opponent of toleration. The Baxterians agreed with Baxter in their willingness to accept a synodical Episcopal Church, and were Nonconformists only and not Dissenters. After the passing of the Act of Uniformity, the Presbyterians made common cause with the Dissenters in self-defence; but when liberty was allowed by the Act of Toleration the Protestant Dissenters all willingly accepted the terms of that Act, which required them to subscribe to the Doctrinal Articles of the Church of England, and they also required from the ministers, if not from the members of the congregations, that security for their orthodoxy known as subscription to creeds or professions of faith. It was not until some of the ministers began to entertain doubts about the doctrine of the Trinity that a public refusal to subscribe to creeds was heard of, and then only a minority of the Dissenters demanded this extension of religious freedom, and these, with few exceptions, if any, were anti-Trinitarians. For some years these 'non-subscribers' took no distinctive name, but for lack of a better to distinguish them from the Calvinistic or Evangelical Congregationalists, they were sometimes called 'Presbyterians,' though they were all by that time Congregationalists, as some of them always had been. In religion these anti-Trinitarians were eminently practical, their preaching was characterised by the absence of doctrine, and they were the staunch defenders of civil and religious liberty. 'Neither the Baptists nor the

Congregationalists, nor both combined, could at this period compare, for mental power and public service to civil and religious freedom, with the Unitarian Presbyterians.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of the last century these so-called 'Presbyterian' congregations proclaimed themselves to be, what in fact they had long been, Unitarians; they banded together in Unitarian Societies, and, with a frankness that is not always sufficiently appreciated, some of them openly called their meeting-houses Unitarian chapels. In the first quarter of the present century some of the Evangelical Dissenters proposed to lay claim to the ancient meeting-houses occupied by Unitarian congregations, and threatened their ejection by law-suit. This attempt, or threatened attempt, was thwarted by the passing of the Dissenters' Chapels Bill in 1844, which secured the Unitarians in peaceable possession, giving them an indefeasible title to the buildings and endowments. They have maintained the fabrics, restored, repaired, and in many instances rebuilt them, and these chapels are therefore now by law and by right, as well as in name, Unitarian chapels.

Unitarianism had no denominational origin. Unitarian congregations are not descended from any one denomination, though if any denominational name were appropriate it is that of Independent, for they hold the absolute autonomy of each congrega-

<sup>1</sup> Skeats, *Hist. Free Churches*, p. 361.

tion, and also the spiritual and intellectual freedom of every minister and member. Unitarianism has an individual and not a denominational origin; its root is not ecclesiastical, but psychological. It sprang from the love of truth, taking possession of individual minds, and such individuals did not allow their pursuit of truth to be arrested by the lines laid down by any ecclesiastical authority; their point of departure was not always the same, the transitional processes were not always identical, but in the end they reached the same conclusion, and embraced that free and undoctinal form of Christianity which is called Unitarian.

It was only natural that these Unitarians should desire to have fellowship with each other, to worship God together, and to band together for their own and the public good, and this is the way that Unitarian congregations and Unitarian societies came into existence. They are still maintained by the same impulse. The love of truth and freedom is essentially individualistic, yet those who have this love in common are united in spirit and bound together by a community of interests, while refusing to be hampered by any ecclesiastical organization. The truth has made them free, and they cherish their freedom as the road by which they may still pursue the truth.

It is, therefore, still impossible to formulate a Unitarian theology, or to say of any set of doctrinal propositions, about these all Unitarians are agreed.

When Belsham wrote the *Calm Inquiry* he supplemented the work with a summary of Unitarian opinions, and doubtless more or less correctly described his own and, as it appeared to him, those which were commonly held at the time ; but few Unitarians now would endorse all the opinions he then expressed, and they were after all only opinions and not dogmas. If we were to imitate Mr. Belsham, and summarize what we take to be the opinions of Unitarians generally, our summary would still lack the element of finality ; it would still be open to revision as new factors contributing to the fuller realization of truth came to be known. Moreover, there is no means of obtaining the consent of Unitarians generally to a confession of faith, and no one has any authority to demand it. Each is free to accept such views of God, of the universe, and of man, and their relation to each other, as appear to his understanding and conscience to be true ; thus we regard truth and freedom as inseparable, and to part with either would mean disloyalty to both.

Amongst Dissenters generally it appears to me that at the present time there are two tendencies at work, the one towards a closer ecclesiastical organization, the attainment of a larger corporate life, as it is called ; the other towards a greater amount of individual liberty. These two tendencies are antagonistic, though the antagonism is not always realized.

The effect of the first, though it might strengthen the union of the churches of a denomination and even unite various denominations, must necessarily act in the restraint of liberty. The separate churches must give up some measure of their individual freedom and agree to subscribe to some common terms of union, and these terms will represent the orthodox creed of all who are embraced within the organization; thus liberty of opinion would be curtailed and fresh support given to the conservative tendency in religion. This is a danger which at present besets the Evangelical Free Churches.

Opposed to this policy of organization is the desire for a larger measure of individual liberty. It is impossible to say which will prevail, but judging by the past it appears probable that in the majority of cases the love of union will predominate over the desire for freedom; but it is also probable that with a minority the love of freedom will triumph over the desire for unity. The desire for freedom arises, as of old, from a disposition to reject or modify some of the doctrines upon which the churches have been established. These doctrines are embodied in declarations of faith and sometimes inserted in the trust deeds of chapels; some of them are, in some cases, no longer believed, or very different and unwarrantable interpretations are put upon them, and ministers and members of congregations are impatient when they find themselves ostensibly

pledged to uphold doctrines that, if the truth were told, they have abandoned. They therefore desire to be released from these restrictions, and every fresh acquisition of truth is followed by a demand for further freedom. Old declarations of faith are being put on one side and new ones of a simpler character, expressed in less definite terms, are being substituted for them, and more individual variety of opinion is permitted. These Dissenters are thus following much the same path as was taken by a minority of their predecessors more than a hundred and fifty years ago. Their theological progress was to a great extent arrested by the Evangelical movement; where the effect of this is subsiding the line of progress is being resumed. Unfortunately, in many cases the Dissenters have hampered themselves by trust deeds which restrict the use of their chapels to such congregations and ministers as hold certain doctrines, but it is well known that in many cases these trusts are disregarded, and these cases will increase as time goes on; it is scarcely likely that any persons will insist upon the conditions of these trusts being rigidly observed, but they have had, and will probably continue to have, an influence which is an impediment to the pursuit and attainment of independent truth.

The anti-Trinitarians and Unitarians have alone followed a line of uninterrupted progress; and Unitarianism has been inseparably bound up with the religious life of England for more than a

century. Unitarians have contributed in no mean degree to the advancement of liberty, of education, of philanthropy, of science, and Biblical learning. No bondage to theological doctrines has restrained them in the pursuit of truth, no sectarian spirit has led them to refuse to associate with any who would join them in promoting the public good. That they have been earnestly devoted to the propagation of the truth as they conceive it cannot be denied, but in this they have only shown that they share with all other Christians the conviction that it is a duty imposed upon every man to proclaim the truth; but they have not insisted that their view of truth is complete and final. They have always been ready to accept new truth, or more complete and perfect knowledge, and to abandon opinions which increased knowledge and experience have shown to be no longer tenable.

Between the period which has come under our review and the present day there is a space which others can fill better than the present writer. It was the halcyon age of Unitarianism; the penal laws against it were repealed, and Unitarians no longer suffered from the disadvantage of acting in defiance of the law if they openly preached their doctrine. Unitarianism had passed through its birth-throes and it enjoyed the vigour and buoyancy of youth, new congregations were formed, and new chapels built. Unitarians were engaged in the promotion of education, in the extension of

civil liberty, in great schemes of philanthropy ; they were in the front ranks of literature, science, and politics.

As to their deep and abiding influence upon religion, it is only necessary to mention such names as Wellbeloved, Carpenter, Beard, Gaskell, Tayler, Thom, Crosskey, Sadler, and Martineau. A wrong impression may easily be drawn from the fact that some of the best known works of Unitarians are more or less of a speculative and controversial character. These naturally attract public attention, but these are only occasional and do not represent their congregational life. This is represented by the devotional services held Sunday after Sunday in the quiet and unpretentious meeting-houses, the lofty thought and deep feeling manifested in the ordinary sermon, the great ideal always set by the preacher before his hearers ; by the pure domestic religion of Unitarian families, the exalted aims of Unitarian public men, the tender philanthropy of Unitarian women ; the noble devotion, the generous self-sacrifice, the peaceful deaths of Unitarian saints. Of these there is but little record except in a few scattered chapters of biography, scarcely known to the great world, but which are among the treasures of Unitarian literature.

END.



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